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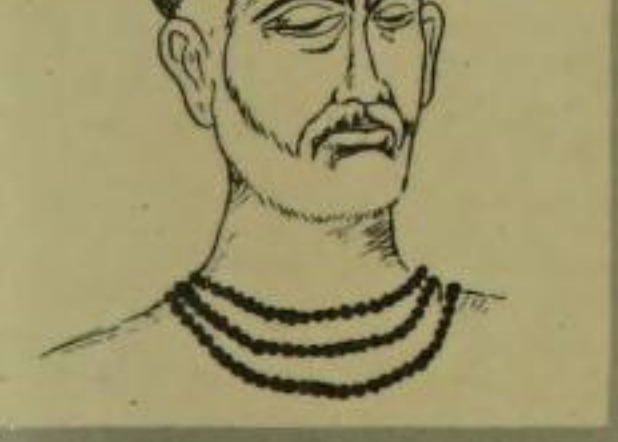

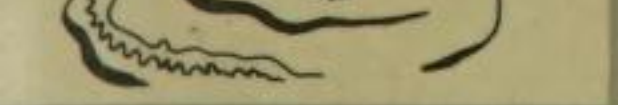

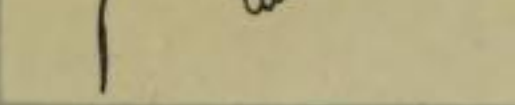

MANOHAR BANDOPADHYAY

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The book acquaints the readers with Hindi Poetic development through the works and life story of twenty great poets for nearly eight centuries from beginning to the present age. Biographically it brings to light numerous obscure aspects of the poets offering an illuminating backdrop of the Socio-political and religious phenomenon of the times. Elucidation of the individual works of the poets has been enriched with comparative references to the English literary history. This is the first book of its kind in English to offer vital information on major Hindi poets and their works since beginning. The book unfolds how the lives of the poets were multi-dimensional.

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Lives and Works of Great Hindi Poets

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For P.S. Bawa

Foreword

Hindi poetry has been a major force in Indian literature for many centuries, and has produced some of the finest poets who have further enriched our long and distinguished literary history. In this book, Shri Manohar Bandopadhyay has given a short but valuable account of 20 poets from the 12th century A.D. right down to our own times. An interesting feature is that he has discussed these representative Hindi poets in terms of 5 peiods — the Age of Heroic Romances, the Age of Religious Devotion, the Age of Stylistic Writing, the Age of Prose and the Contemporary Age. Thus he gives us a synoptic view of Hindi literature down through the age which, I am sure, will be of value to students of Hindi literature in India and abroad.

Karan Singh

Deepawali
13 November 1993

Preface

Hindi is the national language of India. Interest for the makers of literature in this language is a natural curiosity for any one not wholly acquainted with this language. Not much has been however written on Hindi literature in English especially the poetic genre. Scholars visiting India have to satisfy their urge from scant sources or through personal interaction with Indian counterparts. Such information as comes to their hand in a hurried time-frame is inevitably much skimpy and inadequate. In the course of my writing for periodicals and the dailies on Hindi poetry during quarter century or so, I felt all along an express need for an introductory volume on Hindi poets and their works. Towards this aim I have made a modest approach. But then Hindi poetry is a vast field both in historical and textual canons. I have accordingly chosen the representative figures of each successive age since beginning and endeavoured to present biographical appraisal followed with an account of their contributions to Hindi poetry.

Even as poets have been discussed in historical chronology, this book is no substitute for history of Hindi poetry. Nor does it claim to be a scholastic treatise. Within the ambit of twenty great poets from the middle of twelfth century down to our own age till 1990, attempt has been made, as far as possible to provide contextual background on the general poetic stream of the respective age. Literature after all is the product of the civilisation in which the authors exist and are provoked or inspired to write. For such obvious reasons attention has been drawn to socio-economic and religio-political climate of the poets discussed in these pages. It will thus appear how our bards were not merely men of literature but also political advisors, religious preachers and social thinkers too. There were poets who wrote for divine love and also those who wrote secular poetry like majority of poets in this century. Their works were hailed not only as contribution to literature but also as works of religion, theology and philosophy. And our very first poetic work *Prithiviraj Raso* has been read down the centuries as a history. These perspectives have been studied at length in the discussion of respective poets.

As in any literature, there is no dot of the year to specify particular periods to which the poets under study belong. Scholars have variously categorised these periods though most of them only improved upon the divisions first made by Hindi critic and literary historian, Ram Chandra Shukla.

The historical periods for our convenience in Vikram *vis-a-vis* the Christian era are as tabulated below :

Literary Period	*Vikram Era*	*Christian Era*
Veer Gātha Kāl or Ādi Kāl (Age of Heroic Romances or the Beginning)	1050-1375	993-1318
Bakti Kāl (Age of Religion)	1375-1700	1318-1643
Riti Kāl (Age of Stylistic Writing)	1700-1900	1643-1843
Aadhunik Kāl or the Gadya Kāl (Modern Age or the Age of Prose)	1900-1957	1843-1900
Bhartendu Period	1907-1942	1850-1885
Vartaman Kāl (Present Age)	1957-2047	1900-1990
Dwivedi Period	1957-1977	1900-1920
Chhayavad	1975-1993	1918-1936
Pragativad	1993-2007	1936-1950
Prayogvad	2007-2022	1950-1965
Hindi poetry since Prayogvad	2022---	1965---

As mentioned, the periods are not self-contained and overlap each other. Poets writing in one age have much in common with that of others. Vidyapati for instance belonged to Bhakti Kāl though his works are symptomatic of Riti Kāl. Keshav Das also belonged to Bhakti Kāl but it was on his trail that the Riti poetry later prospered. Dwivedi period was still at its height when the new trend of Romantic poetry (Chhayavad) raised its head and was recognised in 1918. In the age of Pragativad (Progressivism) Bachchan produced his masterpieces of what was called the Halavadi poetry and so with experimental poetry.

The experimental poetry which dawned invariably with Agyeya did not end with Nai Kavita which divorcing from any lyrical elements in poetry sought to achieve success through hard-

dry prose even if it resulted in simplistic statements called by some critics Sapat Bayani. During the period overlapping Nai Kavita and experimental poetry in the late sixties there was yet another trend of Nav Geet which sought to retain the essential lyric in poetry and achieved success and limited popularity. There followed however a heterogenous scene since the eighties in Hindi poetry which taking off from the experimentalists has been confessional and far too individualistic. More emphasis was given on new imageries and metaphors and diction tending to day-to-day speech. Instant fame became the prime urge of most poets and movements followed one after another producing similar poetry under different brands.

In most cases I preferred to give excerpts in English translation though I couldn't resist temptation of quoting from original Hindi text especially in Bardai, Keshav Das and Agyeya which also demonstrates how the language evolved during the eight hundred years.

Some of these chapters have their origin in my articles published in various dailies and periodicals among which are : "Indian Literature", "The Statesman", "The Hindustan Times", "Financial Express" and "The Economic Times". Even as the plan of the book was conceived many years ago, the progress lingered due to disturbances, domestic and otherwise which stormed me almost with each chapter. But then I am grateful to my friends and relatives who constantly encouraged and even pestered me to complete the book.

I owe my gratitude to my friends who have helped me variously among whom I wish to make special mention to Dr. Kedar Nath Singh, Dr. Narendra Mohan, Dr. Shyam Singh Shashi, Mr. Sharat Kumar, Mr. K. S. Ramachandran, Mr. Vijay N. Shankar, Mr. Rajendra Awasthy, Mr. F.C. Ahuja, Mr. Pani Ram and Mr. Jagdish Chaturvedi.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Karan Singh who despite his busy schedule spared time to write a foreword to this book.

My thanks are also due to Mr. S. C. Saxena for his painstaking help in providing source material and of course to my wife Richa who compelled me to hasten the concluding chapters of the book. Lastly I thank the publishers who made it possible to reach the work in the hands of my readers.

Manohar Bandopadhyay

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I have nothing in my possession
All that I had is yours
And I lose nothing indeed
To give you what is yours.

—*Kabir*

Chand Bardai

(1149–1192)

The earliest period in Hindi poetry is known as Veer Gātha Kāl or the age of heroic romances. It spans from Samvat 1050 to 1375 which according to Gregorian Calendar corresponds to 993 to 1318 AD. During this period battles were common phenomena among the rulers of Rajasthan and of Delhi to resist the Arab raids and to settle scores with each other. The soldiers kept ever ready in garters were needed to be constantly praised and pampered for their heroic feats. This role was fulfilled by the poets of the time popularly known as *charans* or *bhatts*. Even as they boosted morale of the fighting soldiers they praised to the skies their patron rulers and justified all their acts good or bad. The earliest known bard of this

period is Chand Bardai who wrote in Dingal, a link language between Apbhransa and early Hindi spoken then in Rajasthan and places adjoining Delhi. Chand Bardai not only enlarged and refined it but also made the best expressive medium of his work.

Chand Bardai's greatest contribution to Hindi is *Prithiviraj Raso* written in 1192, more than a century before *Cursor Mundi* (1320) by an unknown author in old English or nearly two centuries before William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (1377?). *Prithiviraj Raso* is the first epic in Hindi. Most scholars consider him to be the first poet in the language. He precedes Vidyapati by nearly one hundred and fifty years. He was a contemporary of *Prithiviraj Chauhan* III, then the ruler of Delhi. Since he was witness to most of the events enumerated in the epic, historians especially Colonel James Todd relied on this epic while writing the history of Rajasthan in view of scant historical records of the time.

Bardai was born in Lahore in 1149. His father, Malh was the court poet of king Someshwar, father of Prithiviraj Chauhan III. He shifted to Delhi during early childhood. He had direct access to the palace and became intimate with prince Prithiviraj, a friendship that was to last till his death. We have no information about the poet's mother. He received best of the education in classical literature, theology, politics, astrology and military sciences at Delhi and Ajmer. He was also acquainted with tantric practices. He had inherited poetic gift in his blood since his father belonged to Bhatt community who lived composing eulogical verses for their patron rulers and the warriors. That he was a special favourite of king Someshwar is borne by the fact that the latter had gifted him ownership of twelve villages. Later when Prithiviraj ascended the throne he gifted him vast lands in the town of Nagore founded by him after crowning. Successors of the poet possessed these lands for several generations. The poet was therefore well-off to devote fully to writing than to worry for mundane needs.

But then Bardai was not merely a poet; he was a diplomat, figther and counsellor too. Prithiviraj Chauhan who valued his genius, used his services far often to solve his problems. He was sent as the emissary to the court of Bhimdev of Gujarat before Prithiviraj contemplated attack on the former. The poet with his cunning and witful debate with Bhimdev and his minister Amar Singh Sewra achieved his mission. Before waging war against Muhammad Ghuri, Prithiviraj sent the poet to influence in his favour the ruler of Jalandhar, Haluli Hamir who then camped in

the fort of Kangra being disgusted in the court of Prithiviraj. The poet played a great diplomatic role in the battle of Kannauj where he also fought against the Kannauj forces. After the fall of Delhi when Prithiviraj was taken a captive, it is said, the poet too followed his patron and committed suicide with him in Gazani. But then the deaths of the duo are as mysterious as the deaths of Jankoji Scindia and Bhau centuries later in the third battle of Panipat.

We have no information about the marriage of the poet. But that he maintained a courtesan as his mistress is evident in the verses 44-45 in the epic: "Gani ganika kavi Chand ki, thag vidya parveen /Doot dhoot anhoot man, navani raj tin keen..." (The courtesan of poet Chand, well versed in the art of deception/And that of a messenger bowed before the king and said...). It was in the context when Prithiviraj III attacked Gujarat. The courtesan brought information about the strength of Gujarat king Bhimdev Chalukya. The courtesans were then used not only for voluptuous gratification but also as spies about which there are several evidences in the epic.

The poet had four sons. There are however scholars who maintain the poet had ten sons whose names were; Sur, Sundar, Sujan, Jalhan, Vallha, Valibhadra, Kehari, Veer Chand, Avdhoot and Gunraj. The controversy however has not been fully resolved. But then the poet's sons, be they four or ten, distinguished themselves in different fields. One was a great warrior and died fighting valiantly iń the battle aganist Ghuri. Jalhan was a good poet whom Bardai entrusted the text of his epic before he set out to help Prithiviraj in Gazani: "Pustak Jalhan hast de, chali Gazan nripa kaaj" (Entrusting the book to Jalhan, he left for Gazani to help the king). While we do not know much about Veer Chand, his son, Harichand is considered as exponent of Dingal lyrics. He even compiled a dictionary. One of poet's sons was converted to Islam. According to some opinion, Veer Chand the author of *Hamir Raso* was the son of Bardai. There are also beliefs that the famous Bhakti poet, Surdas was a descendant of Bardai.

Bardai said he was proficient in six languages and nine sentiments (nava rasa). In addition he talked about his knowledge in politics, theology, ancient scriptures and warfare. His knowledge of *Holy Quran* is quite intriguing since at that time Muslims had made scant cultural inroad into India. The poet said: "Ukti dharma vaishalasya, rajniti, nava rasa / Shat bhasa, Puranan ch, Quran

kathit maya" (I am versed in great religions, politics, nine sentiments, six languages, Puranas and the *Quran*—Verse 83). We do not know precisely what these six languages were. It is likely he referred to Prakrit, Sanskrit, Magdhi, Paishachi, Shaurseni and Apbhransa which had been earlier mentioned by the ninth century scholar Rudrat in his *Kavyalankar*. These six languages were also mentioned in *Dwyashrya* by Hemchandra, the minister of Jai Singh, the ruler of Gujarat and the poet-scholar, Vag Bhatt (1122 AD) in *Vagbhattalankar*. As it is these languages are offshoots from Sanskrit and precursors of Hindi and other languages of Aryan family in the country. Bardai used the words and syntax not only from these languages but also from Arabic and Persian which shows his vast lexican repertoire.

Bardai authored only one book, *Prithiviraj Raso*. It is likely his independent compositions were integrated in this epic. The efforts by some scholars to credit *Jaichand Prakash* to Bardai is futile since there is no evidence to prove such authorship. But the grandeur, metric variety and the treatment of a vast canvas invariably make the epic a great contribution and secure a lasting place for the poet in Hindi literature. Since the plot and events handled in the epic are topical, a brief appraisal of the political scenario of the time will help us appreciate the epic better.

India attracted foreign invaders almost from tenth century AD. Mahmud of Gazani defeated Jaypala, the ruler of Punjab in 1000 AD. His raids were aimed only to replenish his treasury for which he mounted repeated attacks on Multan during 1004-6. Encouraged with the success of these raids he again attacked Punjab in 1008 and went home with huge wealth. As the temples in north- west India were the depositories of vast wealth, Mahmud directed his next attacks on the temple towns of Mathura, Thaneswar, Kannauj and in 1025 Somnath where in the invasion according to some Arab sources 50,000 people were slain and vast treasures were seized by the invader who also demolished the temples and idols. Such events leading to attack on religion fired the Rajput kings with chivalric rage to decide fate in the battleground than to flee. In this effort to repulse the invaders they had support of their soldiers and the people.

During that period and early, Delhi was being ruled by the Tomaras who had founded the city in 736. Involved in inter-feudatory rivalries and dynastic feuds, the Delhi or Ajmer rulers made no attempt to unitedly face the invaders. By twelfth century

Tomaras were overthrown by the Chauhans who had ruled over eastern Rajashan. Chauhans had earlier resisted the Arab raids and were known for their heroic feats. The last of Chauhan kings of Delhi was Prithiviraj III. It was during his time that Muhammad Ghuri conquered Lahore in 1185. Prithiviraj consolidated his power and fought the invader in 1191 at Tarain. He quite won the battle but in the second attempt at the same place in 1192 he was defeated and taken prisoner. Thus Ghuri conquered Delhi and later Ajmer too.

Prithiviraj was a romantic hero who had wooed and married Sanjyokta, daughter of Jaichand, king of Kannauj. He is said to have greatly offended Jaichand who unable to take revenge invited Ghuri for the invasion. Prithiviraj's glory was sung by Bardai in his *Prithiviraj Raso* though with exaggeration and exuberant poetic liberty. But then the epic has all literary and historical worth of medieval India.

Bardai alluded in the beginning of the epic that he had written it in seven thousand couplets (rupaks): "Sat sahas, nash-shish saras, sakal aadi muni divya/Ghat-bud mat koyoo pado, mohi dusan na vasishya" (It has seven thousand rapturous couplets, all blessed by ancient sages and gods/None should read less or more to give me pain). In verse number fifty he said: "Sahas satt rupak saras, guna sundar vahu vitt/Le pustak kavi Chand ki diya mata vahu ritt" (The poet Chand presented to the goddess his book of seven thousand couplets full of variety and virtues.) However in the published form of the epic we have sixteen thousand three hundred couplets. Apparently the additions were made by not only Jalhan who compiled and edited it but also by the successive editors. Many later-date references therefore have crept into the epic. For instance describing the battle formation in verse seven-tyone the poet says: "Hath nari gori jamboor ghan, duhu bahn ubhaiti rush" (On either side were the soldiers of Ghuri, standing with rage along canons of different sizes). We know the earliest use of canons in India was by Babur. Similarly, there is some inconsistency in the reference of Samar Singh who is certainly of later date. The epic therefore is of synthetic value in historical references.

Prithiviraj Raso is written in sixty nine cantos (Samayas). While portraying the life of Prithiviraj III from beginning to end, it enumerates various legends, rituals, towns and seasons with un-

usual prolixity. His description of the battle formation is much based on *Mahabharat*. Similarly ecstasies of seasons depicted by him remind us of Jaideva's *Ratimanjari*. The poet has also drawn freely from *Bhagvat* and *Bhavishya Purana* as in the detailed delineation of Parikshit's slaying of Takshak, Janmejaya's serpent sacrifice or the salvation of Mount Abu. The poet has also taken unusual delight in the erotic descriptions. The structure and the plot of the epic is far too loose and the liberties taken in the factual matters are unpardonable. We have no information about Ghuri being taken captive by Prithiviraj Chauhan. But according to the poet Ghuri was not only taken prisoner by his patron (Prithiviraj) in the battle of Ghaghghar but also his vast wealth and military provisions were seized.

Bardai used as many as seventy two poetic patterns in his epic displaying a masterly handling of the metres with perfect control over syllables. He however twists the words and draws them freely from all languages he knew to suit his purpose. The ruggedness and grating effect in his verse is as much characteristic of his age just as the hyperboles and verbosity of *bhaat* versifiers of his time. The range and dimension of his patterns prove that he had inherited them from a tradition that had used and perfected much before him. Among the patterns used by him are: doha, chaupai, satank, vahuvitt, soratha, gaatha, rola, kundaliya, varta, shloka, dadank, tarak, malini, hanuphal etc. In his use of figures and delineation of female beauty (nakha-sikha) and seasons he seems to herald the Riti poetry that were to develop nearly five hundred years after him. He used shloka in Sanskrit fashion and gaatha in Prakrit. He followed Dingal grammar.

Bardai appears in his epic not only as the chronicler of his age but also a social scientist giving a complete pen-picture of his time; rituals at birth, courtship, marriage, women's habits, food and living conditions, beliefs in supernatural, festivals etc. An allusion to the Holi festival:

> "Why this day in Falgun, men and women hurl their shames?
> The old and the young and little ones, leave their homes
> And squatter about in groups, abusing and shouting filth
> In disregard to elders and teachers, people of all
> Four classes drink and eat all dirt..." (Verse No.22)

And here a picture of Kannauj town:

"Beat of drums early morning like clouds roaring
The way led through orchards of oranges and pomegranates
And flowers of various kinds...
There was music all over, the courtesans danced
Markets hubbed in transaction of pearls, and diamonds
And golds and dresses of all kinds...
Drapers doing fine work with golden threads..."

(Verse No. 424-435)

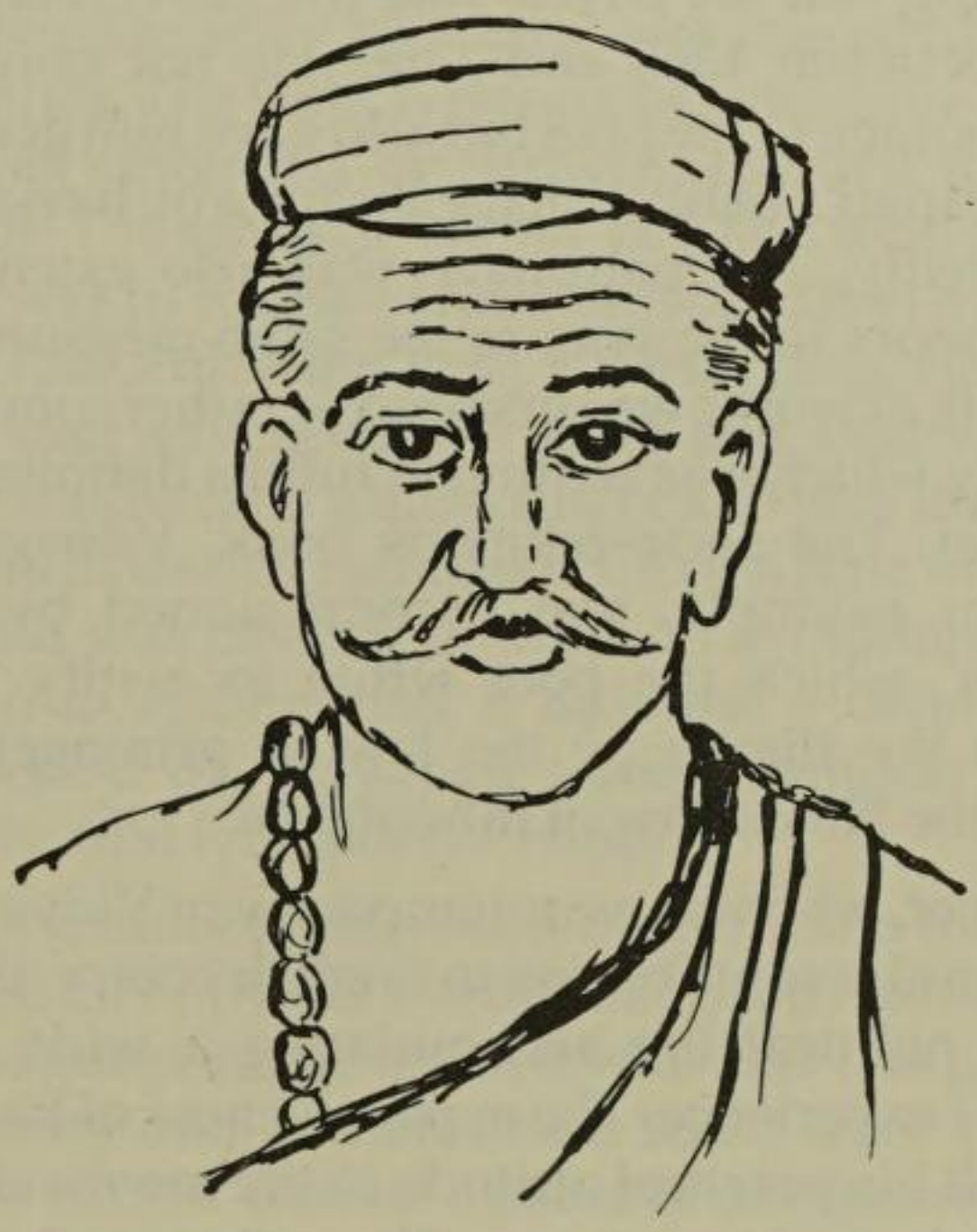
The hyperboles and make-beliefs employed by Bardai are incredible to modern sensibility. He took his audience for granted whom he tried to convince that his poetic genius was a gift (Var) from Goddess Jwala and hence his poetic name as Bardai ! So does he glorify his patron who he says with three thousand odd soldiers fought with eithty lakh soldiers of Jaichand in Kannauj. He writes with exuberant mirth his power of magic and would like us to believe the supernatural episode at Nigambodh Ghat of Delhi. Similarly, the historical irrelevancies are the disturbing feature in the epic. It is historically incorrect to say, as the poet does in his work, that Delhi king Someshwar was killed by Bhimdev Chalukya of Gujarat for which Prithiviraj intended to take revenge. The poet's account of Prithiviraj's death is also far too imaginative. According to him Prithiviraj was taken captive and blinded in Gazani. On hearing about it Bardai who was earlier captive of Hamir went all along to Gazani to help the king. There the poet arranged a show of Prithiviraj's marksmanship in which the blinded king shot the arrow at Mahmud throwing his skull to pieces. We know Mahmud was assassinated by his own soldiers and not killed by Prithiviraj Chauhan III; though under mysterious circumstances.

Yet, despite such prolix historical inconsistencies, the *Raso* has many historical accounts from which however imaginations and exaggerations have to be subtracted. The poet afterall wrote a work of art, an epic and not history. And he completed it in two months and fifteen days. Some of the western scholars however were amazed at the historical facts strewen in the epic. The French scholar Garca da Tassi said, "Chand's book is a complete history of his age". He reported that a hand-written copy of the epic was

found in the Asiatic Society of London from which the first part had been translated by Robert Lanze, a Russian scholar. Lanze wished to publish it in St. Petersberg in 1836. But due to his sudden death the Russian translation could not appear.

Bardai's *Prithiviraj Raso* made such a deep impact upon his successive generation that Raso tradition became the common fashion of the poets writing in Dingal. Among such works were *Visaldev Raso* by Narpati Nalh, *Khuman Raso* by Dalpat Vijay and *Vijaypal Raso* by Nalh Singh Bhatt. Among these the first two became very popular though far less in grandeur and magnitude of *Prithiviraj Raso*. *Visaldev Raso* written in sixteenth century in erotic verses describes the marriage of Visaldev with the daughter of King Bhoja, the ruler of Dhar and his dejection that prompted him to leave for Orissa. But then it holds more for its sonorous lyrics than the story of Visaldev. All the same Bardai for whom poetry was like a sword-play remains a legendary figure in early Hindi poetry deluding both the historians and the literary investigators.

Vidyapati



(1350–1460)

In quantitative magnitude Vidyapati's major works are in Sanskrit and not Maithili. Among fourteen works attributed to him as many as eleven are in Sanskrit, two in Abahatta (or Apabhransa) and only one in Maithili. The last in this sequence an anthology of songs–too, was not compiled by the poet himself. Long after his death it was given a book shape by his admirers from the stray songs composed by him on numerous occasions. Even so this solitary Maithili work of the poet inspired the great poets of Bengal and the whole generation of the saint poets (Sur, Tulsi, Kabir and also Meera) on one hand and the dominant poets of Hindi Riti period Matiram

Bihari and Keshavdas, on the other. Such was the formidable influence of Vidyapati on his generations that he is today equally claimed by Hindi and Bengali to be the poet of respective languages.

'Maithil Kokil' Vidyapati Thakur (1350-1460) lived in the court of Shiv Singha for nearly 36 years after having a brief sojourn in the court of Kirti Singha for whom he wrote his first work the *Kirtilata,* an eulogy on his (patron King's) victory. Shiv Singha, whom the poet described as 'a discerning lover of poetry and women (the king had six wives) like the proverbial King Bhoja' ruled Tirhut between 1368 and 1406. He not only provided a respectful anchorage to the poet but also gave him generous grants including Vidyapati's native village Bisapi which enabled the poet to write devotedly. The patronage was also extended by Shiv Singha's successors to the poet in the same measure. Eventually Vidyapati's bulk of works was inspired or rather commissioned by the royal family which was written to fulfil a definite objective set before the poet. The socio-religious book, *Vibhagsara* (yet unpublished), for example, was commissioned by Narasingha 'Darpanarayan' which the poet wrote to justify the claim of Narasingha to the throne by the law of primogeniture taking cognizance of the Hindu law of inheritance.

Like Chaucer, who was a contemporary of Vidyapati and who made almost similar contribution to English poetry, the latter lived a very active political life accumulating a wide spectrum of knowledge and experience. The expansiveness of knowledge and learning as well his practical attitude to life are manifest in all his works. His works in Sanskrit are; *Bhuparikrama, Purush Pariksha, Likhanavali, Vibhagsara, Varshakritya, Gayapattalak, Shaiv Sarvsar, Parambhut Purana Sangrah, Ganga Vakyavali, Dan Vakyavali* and *Durgabhakti Tarangini.* Those written in Abahatta include; *Kirtilata* and *Kirtipataka.* The *Durgabhakti Tarangini* is considered to be the last work of the poet. In addition to these three more works attributed to Vidyapati have also been brought to light but their exact identity has yet to be established. The works are; *Dwait Nirnay, Gangabhyudaya* and *Tantrarnava.*

Vidyapati's Maithili work *Padavali* is a collection of some 945 songs (about 800 traced so far) characterised by sweetness of expression, mellifluous rhythm and an imagery that is at once vivid and simple. A large number of them are the love songs depicting

numerous situations, moods and expressions of sexual love of his characters with frequent references to Lord Krishna and the *gopis*. Some of these songs also possess relevance to various social functions and are sung by the Mithila women down the centuries till our own day. The book is indisputably a *magnum opus* of Vidyapati and for that matter of Hindi poetry.

Padavali's chief gift to Hindi or Bengali consists in its consummate lyricism. The earliest trace of lyrical poetry is found in *Samveda*. Kalidasa's *Ritu Samhara* and *Meghdoota* are the best Sanskrit models of lyrical compositions. A great deal of fruition of this genre is found in *Geetgovinda* by Jayadeva who preceded Vidyapati by over two centuries. The vedic lyrics are of two kinds–*rik* and *gaatha*. The former was employed by Sarhapa, the first to initiate lyric poetry in Hindi. The saints of 'Natha' cult had used the latter form of lyric which was in course of time best specified by '*Raso*' works (viz., *Visaldev Raso,Prithiviraj Raso, Khuman Raso, Hamir Raso* etc.). Amir Khusro later advanced this genre and attached his Persian accretions. He was himself a lucid singer and well learned in music which added an extended significance to the lyric in Hindi. But all this while Hindi was passing through an evolutionary stage and was more akin to Apbhramsa. It acquired a definite form only during the period of Vidyapati which compels us to accept Vidyapati as the first lyric poet of Hindi.

Writing for mainly women and the common folks of Mithila, Vidyapati chose for his lyrics Maithili as against Sanskrit. The latter was still the language of the learned who also charged the poet of naivity, perversity and parochialism. Some were very severe in their protest as Robert Greene against Shakespeare and the poet had to protect himself against these onslaughts as in *Kirtilata* he rebuffs: "Vidyapati's language is like the young Moon, that adorns the forehead of Lord Shiva that ravishes the hearts of the connoisseurs of poetry." And yet Vidyapati kept a careful eye on the two kinds of people who constituted his audience. Former were the highbrow men of the court or his own learned kinsmen for whom the poet selectively used *tatsam* words in his diction and the latter constituted the common folks or the women for whom he used the native speech of spoken tongue and here the *tadbhava* words prevail in colloquial flow.

Unlike the Siddha poets Vidyapati did not propound any doctrine or principles in his lyrics. He also did not indulge in narratives in the manner of 'Natha' poets. He avoided the multi-

syllabic words as well as all those that jarred the ears. His metaphors and similies are simple though subtle with a Coleridgean flight of imagination. The wit of his characters is frank and even daring if we examine it in the light of women-liberty of the Middle Ages:

> Leaving her alone unto the care of Hari
> We went away. He missed not the opportunity;
> Her arm he took by his hand and dispelled her fears
> By sweet coaxings. Now they relaxed
> On the bed rapt in full sexual urges.
> He kissed each part of her frame and as he
> Rejoiced in his kissings she throbbed dreadfully...

Using the dialogue-form in his lyrics Vidyapati discovered cleverest ways of saying anything that the modern poet would hammer out to say in his direct expression. His successors, nevertheless, followed the same pattern, the empirical use of which may be seen in Sur and Meera. But the poet remained conscious through and through of the musical adaptability of his poems. His dialectic apart from carrying a tongue-in cheek humour repletely chimes in a resonance in all appropriateness to musical setting. It is for such obvious reasons that his songs were widely memorised by women and sung at various festivals and seasons. To set Vidyapati's songs to music, Raja Shiv Singha, it deserves mention, had appointed a famous professional musician, named, Jayanta which well demonstrates the high esteem that his royal patron had for his poems to music.

That much of his verses are erotic poetry stems from the fact that the poet had the need to keep not only his royal patrons (Kirti Singha, Shiv Singha, Dev Singha etc.) but also his fellow courtiers in good humour and as the latter lived an easy life being comparatively safe from outside attacks, the erotic poetry pleased them more than any other kind. Even in his devotional songs his erotic traits are tangibly alive.

The erotic poetry of Vidyapati celebrates both union and separation. Thematically it may be seen in three broad categories; the amorous songs of common men and women, Radha-Krishna and their playmates; and Shiva-Parvati. Vidyapati's Shiva-Parvati or Radha-Krishna are not deified like those in Jayadeva; they are the common lovers of his contemporary Mithila world. And although Vidyapati followed Jayadeva's lyric tradition he made a

significant extension as he wrote with equal attention to both sound and sense for which he was hailed by the people and the court as 'Nav Jayadeva' or the New Jayadeva.

He delineated the beauty of the exciting parts of woman's body in a telescopic depiction with an enduring patience and absorbing interest:

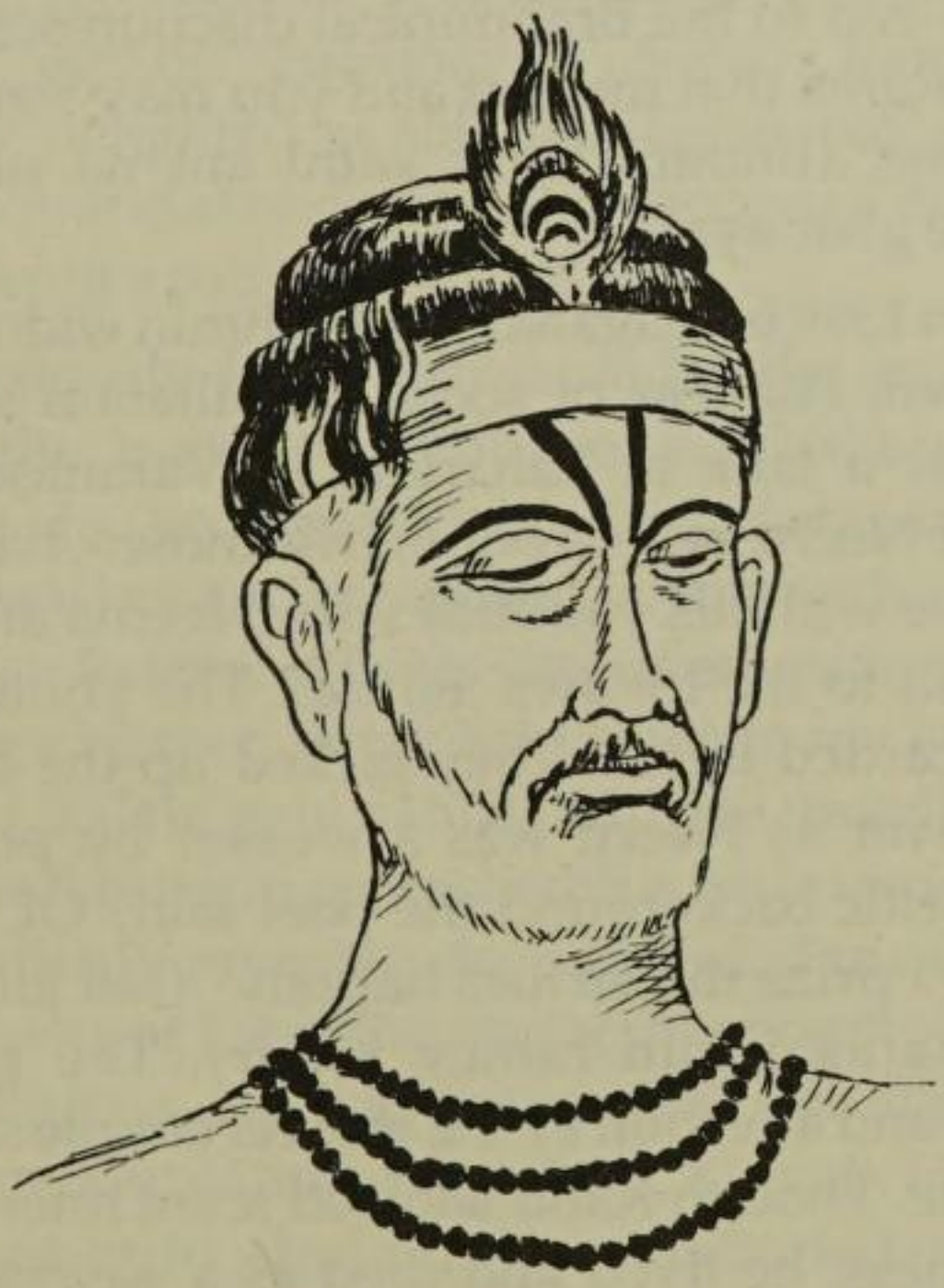
> Her feet are as winsome as the lotus stems
> She ambles like a tipsy elephant. Her loins
> Are as slim as that of the lions, resting
> Over thighs of golden banana which glistens
> Above her breast like the grandeur of a mountain
> And on this mount are two lotuses blossomed
> Yet fair, yet without the vines.
> And the lotuses would not wither away
> For the emerald Ganges of the necklace flows...

Although Vidyapati's eyes were on the physical aspects of feminine body, he delved deeper into women psychology and portrayed with uncanny dexterity their moods, aspirations, thoughts, actions, worry and agony. Even when he writes on seasons and nature it is woman and her traits that stand in the foreground of the poet's observation. These innate features answer why Vidyapati's songs are hummed even today by every household of Mithila. The Mithila women have divided all love-songs of Vidyapati under four groups: *tirhuti* (love lyrics), *bat-gamani* (welcome songs), *yoga* (songs of captivation) and the *uchiti* (songs of reconciliation). In the celebration of Shiva's marriage and his family life, the poet created a new variety of poetry called the *Nachari*. These songs are characterized by their individual tunes and became immensely popular among the people of Mithila and Bengal. The instant popularity of these songs eclipsed the poet's other songs in his canon so much so that later on Abul Fazal in his *Ain-i-Akbari* called all the songs of the poet as *Nachari*.

Scholars are divided whether Vidyapati was an erotic or a religious poet. As his poetry celebrated the lore of Radha-Krishna and the character of Shiva-Parvati; this lent ground in favour of the poet being religious. Further, Vidyapati's later compositions bemoaning the ephemerality and vacuity of life as well as resignation to Lord also added sustenance to the argument as religious poet. Chaitanya and also other saints of Vaishnava cult took Vidyapati's poems, howsoever erotic, on religious value and 'felt

divine love in sexual way.' But the moot point is that Vidyapati was a poet not merely by profession, but was also a courtier and a statesman with varied interests in life and could not ignore the primary need to please his audience. Eventually as an author of erotic poetry he painted amorous portraits of beauty, charm, spell and love-making using allegories of Radha-Krishna and Shiva-Parvati. His allusions, however, make full revelations that his Radha-Krishna or Shiva-Parvati are manifestly Rani Lakshmidevi and Raja Shiva Singha whom the poet eulogized as the 'eleventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu'.

Kabir Das



(1399–1492)

Kabir Das is one of the three great poets of Hindi Bhakti movement; the other two being Surdas and Tulsidas. But both as a religious preacher and as a poet, Kabir is a unique figure of his age and stands out quite distinctly from all other poets who preceded or succeeded him. Being raised by a Muslim family he had Islamic accretions even as he worshipped Lord Rama. Yet his Lord was formless. He lived as a saint but did not discard his family life. He was a *yogi* and a Vaishnavaite but did not share the orthodoxy of the either.

Foremost among the dozen and a half mystic poets who occupy the galaxy of Sufi poetry, Kabir was adored by the very

people whom he condemned most. A fine flower of the fifteenth century India, he moved the learned and illiterates in equal measure. He wrote simple yet profound verses which became quotable quotes down the centuries by all and sundry on all occasions. Quite sagaciously Kabir did not strive to elevate the common men to the height of learned but brought down philosophy to the comprehension of ordinary people :

> "There is no end to the Brahminical discoureses. It is the devotion of Rama that matters and you may learn it even in your home".(Brahmi kathi kathi ant na paya/Ram bhakti baithe ghar aya).

Kabir was born in 1399 in Magahar to a Brahmin widow whose consort was unknown. For fear of social humiliation she abandoned the child near a tank at Lahartara in Varanasi. Here a weaver, Nuruddin or Neeru as he is popularly known, happend to pass on his way home with his youthful wife, Neema after *gouna* (a bride's second visit to the in-laws' house). The young couple took pity on the discarded infant. They picked up the child and raised him as a weaver as Neeru was a weaver by profession. Referring to his dynastic background the poet said,"Of weaver's clan, living in peace/I prize the virtues happily" (Jati julaha mati ko dheer/harashi-harashi gun ramey Kabir). The poet was lavished with all love and affection by the weaver couple since they did not have any issue. Though Kabir showed scant interest in his profession as a business, he lived and died as a weaver. Neeru belonged to the Natha sect which specialised in *yogic* practices. It was as such in his cultural upbringing that Kabir derived his immense knowledge in *yogic* system which embodies the recurring theme of most of his poems.

Kabir developed a meditative habit at a very early age. For his super intelligence he could not mingle freely with the boys of his age and suffered loneliness. One day being embraced by his playmates he withdrew to the wharf of the Ganga and fell asleep. He was almost trampled under the feet of the famous saint, Swami Ramanand who happened to cross over the body back from his early morning river bath. As he saw the boy under his feet, he leapt out repentently; "Rama! Rama!"; he cried (Oh Lord!) Kabir who woke up at this moment took his words as his 'gurumantra' (tip by the teacher). He went home inspired and proclaimed himself to be

the disciple of Swami Ramanand. The devotees of Swami Ramanand could hardly tolerate the weaver boy claiming as the disciple of the great saint. They complained to Swami Ramanand about it who was himself ignorant for having ordained any weaver boy in his fold. When Kabir was asked to explain, he outwitted all the capricious devotees. The Swami gave, he said, 'gurumantra' to his disciple in whisper but in his (Kabir's) case, he said, the Swami had bestowed his 'mantra' as loudly as possible. He said the very word 'Rama' was his 'gurumantra'. Swami Ramanand who was astonishingly delighted at this intelligent reply is said to have hugged the boy and at once made his professed disciple. This event changed the entire course of Kabir's life.

Quite zealously Kabir learnt under the guidance of Swami Ramanand the intricate philosophy of Shaiv Advaita (non-dualism). He also acquired a basic knowledge of Arabic, Persian and later of Sanskrit and composed poems with a lively admixture of local dialect. Referring to his formal education he said, "I never touched ink and paper, never held a pen in my hand" (Masi kagat chhooyo nahi, kalam gahi nahi haath). He travelled extensively in the country and came in contact with a wide variety of people. His poetry accordingly reveals a deep knowledge of various dialects, customs and way of life of the northern topography as also various sects and religions. He was married to Loi and is said to have begotten a son, Kamal and a daughter, Kamali. He died at Maghar in 1492. According to Abul Fazal he was buried in a temple at Puri.

Kabir's poems have been orally transmitted. There are some sixtyone books attributed to the poet of which fortythree have been published. The authenticity of some of these books is however open to doubt. Of these, only three books are said to contain the original poems of the poet. These are: *Kabir Granthavali* (edited by Dr. Shyam Sundar Das), *Sant Kabir* (edited by Dr. Ramkumar Verma) and the *Bijak*. The last work was brought out by the followers of Kabir some eight years after his death. This being the earliest copy, there is less possibility of synthetic lines since the other two volumes were compiled after about four centuries of Kabir's death. The *Bijak* contains 115 stanzas (padas) and 345 couplets (dohas). Kabir used all the prevalent patterns; sakhi, dohas, padas (stanzas of seven to ten lines) and ramjanis (stanzas of five to eight double lines). Guru Arjun Dev compiled several

verses of Kabir in *Guru Granth Sahib*. He had chosen from the poet's canon some 228 padas and 242 sakhis.

For Kabir, poetry was a means to express his socio-religious and philosophical views and not an end in itself. He was essentially a religious preacher and social reformer. All that he thought and expressed was most original and backed with intensest feelings. In stating what was true to his conscience he compromised with none even if he had to face severe eventualities in social, religious or political spheres. He had the essential ego of a poet. He refused to salute Sikander Lodhi in his court and said bluntly that he knew only one emperor and that was Lord Rama. He braved courageously the harshest torments he was put to by the infuriated henchmen of the emperor.

In his religious faith Kabir condemned scathingly the ostentatious display of the Hindus and Muslims indiscriminately. He declared very emphatically that one's own self could free the body from the cycles of births and deaths and not the formal ceremonies of worship in temples and mosques:

> "Erecting stones and pebbles they built up a mosque.
> Over which yells the Mullah as though the God is deaf"
> (Kankar Paththar jor ke masjid liyo chunai/Ta chadi Mullah bang de kiya bahira hua Khudai).

And again:

> "Hindus died worshipping deities and the Muslims died going to Haj." (Dev poojey Hindu muye, Turak muye Haj jai).

Kabir preached simple life and exhorted the people for purification, forgiveness and service to others. As a philosopher his concept of knowledge (gyan) was supplemented by devotion (bhakti). He accepted Swami Ramanand's precept of devotion to Rama but his Rama was no human incarnation embedded with five elements. Rama was for him Nirguna God: "Nirguna Rama, Nirguna Rama, japahu re bhai" (Brothers, worship Rama that is formless). He set aside the tenet of dualism and refused to accept the existence of self and God in separation. For his concept of God, he drew both from Upanishadic non-dualism and the Islamic monoism. To make comprehensible his God to his followers he added Vaishnavite devotion (bhakti) and the love of Sufism. The universe he said, is born of Brahma and will ultimately merge into

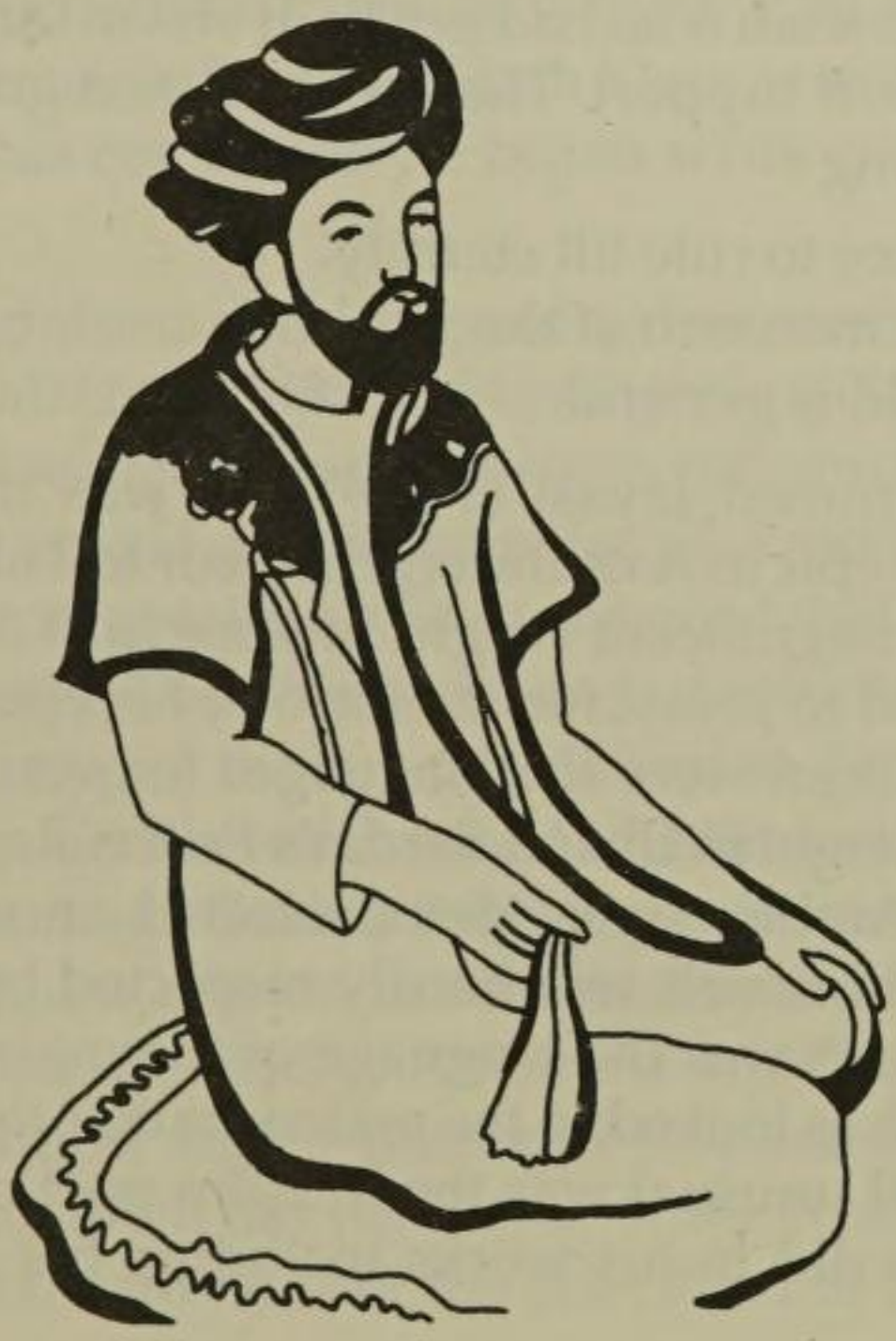
Brahma. Brahma is beyond the three attributes of *sat* (being), *raj* (becoming) and *tam* (non-being). His God is at once Knowledge, Truth and Light, attainable through love and devotion: "None could be wise, reading world's scriptures/He that reads the two letters with love is wise" (Pothi pad, pad jag muaa, pandit bhaya na koi/Doi akhar prem ke pade so pandit hoi). The poet meant by two letters, Lord Rama. In his famous song describing the Anhad Nad, he explained of Shabda Brahma of the *Brahmasutra*, the significance of absolute word to know the analogy of God which he personified with Lord Rama for masses to follow.

Kabir thus preached and composed poems for masses. His poetry is simple with words and idioms chosen from the local dialect. He picked them up during his travels to different regions. There are words in his verses from Punjabi, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Brijbhasha and so on. This made his verses of larger appeal and cosmopolitan in complexion. For the exposition of vigorous truths and provocative thinking, his verses did not stale with the passage of time. There are penetrating homilies, colloquial metaphors and apt similes in his lines. He portrayed a complete picture of social life in his poems. Lives of weavers, tailors, grocers, moneylenders, dyers and various tradesmen find detailed delineation in his poetry. His dialectic of arguments was very forceful and even when people disagreed with him, they could not remain blind to the vital truths he brought to focus as he said, "You say what you read/I say what I saw" (Tu kahata kagat ki lekhi/Hun kahata ankho ki dekhi). His imageries move on an extensive canvas. But because Kabir's main concern was to communicate with the masses, he paid little attention to the language and did not care for his syntaxes. The solid weight of his poetry was his experience and he moved the masses because he spoke to them from the depth of his experience, common to both. Tagore paid the aptest tribute to Kabir's poetry when he said, "Kabir gives utterance to the words of experience and he knows very well that all other things are untrue." Kabir did not hanker after any court patronage and therefore had not to subject his poetry to a particular class. Yet when he sought to appeal the masses he did not accept the zeitgeist of his age. He rather revolted against all irrational practices however unpalatable it was to his followers.

According to some legends, Kabir loved a courtesan, Ramjania whom he refers in his poems. He lived a long life. Some sources maintain that he died at the age of 120. His followers were both

Hindus and Muslims, noted among them were, Virsingh Wakhela and Bijli Khan. After his death both Muslims and Hindus insisted to perform the last rites according to their respective religious customs. As the legend goes, in this dispute all that remained on his bed, was a handful of flowers. These flowere were shared by the either group equally. Whatever be the truth of the legend, the great mystic poet survives till today in hearts of the millions of Indians who find renewed strength and inspiration from his poetry both in joy and grief.

Malik Mohammed Jayasi



(1470–1542)

When Ibrahim Lodi, the ruler of Delhi (1517-1526) mocked at the one-eyed, pock-marked man from Rae Bareili, little did he realise that he was deriding one of the greatest living poets of his time. The man of ugly looks was Malik Mohammed Jayasi who was also deaf by one ear. Perhaps Jayasi himself wasn't very sure that his works would be precious treasure for over four hundred years now. He sought no court favour but was hurt that the emperor chose to comment on his ugly face rather than his verses. He expressed his feelings on the historic raillery in a couplet:

I am the poet of love,
A frail frame sans flesh or blood

Those who saw my face, laughed,
Those who heard me, wept.

Years later, it is said, when Shershah Suri became the ruler of Delhi (1540-1545), the new king paid a special visit to the poet in his village Jayas and sought his blessings. Shershah was wiser than Ibrahim Lodi. Jayasi was a Sufi poet. The Sufi saints and poets then exercised great influence upon the masses. It was proper and expedient for Shershah who had a distant vision for administrative reforms, to win Sufi support. The poet had then grown pretty old. He blessed the king :

I bless thee to rule till eternity.
Thou art monarch of the world.
The world is grateful.

Malik Mohammed Jayasi (1470-1542) was the first poet in Hindi to write an epic in Avadhi as precursor to Tulsidas who took the dialect to a magnificent height in *Ramcharit Manas*. Tulsidas was also indebted to Jayasi for the form of his epic. Before Jayasi, *apabhransa* and *dingal* were the languages for versification which reached its epic height in Chand Bardai's *Prithvi Raj Raso*. A scholar in Persian and Arabic, Jayasi demonstrated an unusual trait in preferring Avadhi which was hardly respected by the court and the rulers even as it was the language of the masses southeast of Delhi. The poet thus looked to the masses rather than the court for his audience. Still unusual was the Muslim poet choosing Hindu themes as Jayasi did in his works including his magnum opus, *Padmavat*.

Writing on Hindu themes with love and passion, Jayasi also represented the tradition of scores of Muslim poets who chose Hindu mythologies for their works. These were Nizami, Mulla Daud, Gawasi, Mulla Vajahi, Mukimi, Gulam Ali and Kutban. Such a long poetic tradition flourishing since eleventh century gives an evidence of Hindu-Muslim harmony in the country even when the rulers fought in the name of the religion. The Muslims who settled in this country so deeply adopted the culture and ways of life of the place of settlement that the identity of their descendants became difficult to locate except perhaps by their names. In the subsequent period, some of the poets emerged as the social reformers condemning the dogmas both in Hinduism and Islam. This trend reached a pinnacle in the fifteenth-sixteenth century in the writings of the Sufi poets who held the faith that

man's union with God would be attained through love. Jayasi holds a supreme position among the Sufi poets.

An Arab descendant, Jayasi belonged to village Jayas, 107 kilometres southeast of Lucknow. Jayas was then under direct rule of Delhi Sultanate. His father Malik Sheikh Mamrej was a farmer. His mother was the daughter of Sheikh Alahdad of Manikpur. The poet lost his parents in early childhood and roamed about places with wandering hermits in whose company he learnt Sanskrit and about the Puranas, Sufism and Hath Yoga as evident in his works. According to his confession he began writing around the age of thirty.

Jayasi lived during the reign of six successive rulers of Delhi: from Bahlol Lodi (1451-1488) to Shershah Suri (1540-45). His verses were sung and recited on various socio-religious occasions during his lifetime. It is said when the ruler of Amethi heard a beggar singing a song of Jayasi, he was so charmed that he urged the poet to settle in Amethi. The poet had then just completed his great epic, *Padmavat*. He obliged the ruler and lived at Amethi till his death (1542). Until today the Hindus and Muslims visit the tomb of the poet and pay homage. Such is the household veneration of the poet like Rahim or Kabir, adored and revered by the people irrespective of caste or creed. Ironically, Amethi is known today as the test-ground of political super stars and few are aware around the country that the town has the shrine of the creator of *Padmavat*. A fitting memorial in honour of the poet is yet to be erected there.

Though author of several works, Jayasi's eminence in Hindi poetry radiates for his great epic, *Padmavat* (1540). His other works are *Akhravat, Chitra Rekha, Maslanama, Kaharanama* and *Akhri Kalam*. Scholars however attribute numerous other books to the poet like, *Shekharavat, Champavat, Itaravat, Khurbanama, Murai Nama* etc. Definite authenticity of Jayasi's authorship of these books is still doubted. For lack of evidence it is also difficult to arrive at exact dates of completion of his works except that *Akharavat* was written when the poet was a little over thirty and that *Akhri Kalam* was written in 1529. The poet wished his verses to be read by Hindus and Muslims alike and chose to write in chaste Avadhi using Nagri script. The numerous copies available in Persian are not in his hand. He took upon the prevalent metric forms like *Chaupais* and *dohas* and enriched them to such perfection that after him Goswami

Tulsidas found them quite handy to use in his works including *Ramcharit Manas*. The success of Tulsidas for using Avadhi in his great epic thus owes a great deal to the path blazed by Jayasi.

Padmavat is primarily a love story developed in epic dimension. The king of Ceylon (Sinhal Dweep) Gandharvasen finds no groom worthy of his daughter, Padmavati. Ratansen, the king of Chittor, learns the celestial charm of Padmavati through his pet parrot (Hiraman) and at once falls in love with her. He sets out with his soldiers in the garb of ascetics to win Padmavati in marriage. The epic describes allegorically the soul's quest for divine union.

> Nothing appeals him, he looks heavenward,
> For whose vision the sages and ascetics
> Meditate eternally.

So is the parrot described as the divine guide to attain divine union. Ratansen braves innumerable obstacles on land and sea and finally succeeds in his mission. Wedded to Padmavati, he has however a brief spell of conjugal happiness. A priest, namely, Raghav Chetan (The evil) incites the ruler of Delhi, Ala-ud-din Khilji to attack Chittor and win the priceless trophy of the world, Padmavati. The Sultan makes it a prestige issue and lays siege of the fort. With deceits and false promises the Sultan invites the king for a summit and makes him a prisoner. Padmavati however manages the release of the king through the help of Gora and Badal. Fighting subsequently with Devpal who had earlier betrayed Ratansen, the latter succumbs to fatal injuries. On his death, Padmavati along with Nagmati (another queen of Ratansen) end their lives. The defenceless Chittor then falls to an easy conquest of Khilji. "Khilji then battered the fort/Chittor fell to Islam."

Thus Jayasi made the historic battle between Ala-ud-din Khilji and Ratansen as the main theme of his plot. But in the treatment of his epic he used the episode of Babur's attack on Chittor. Rana Sanga's son Ratansen was similarly betrayed by his former noble, Surajmal and Chittor was ransacked by the Mughal emperor. Since Babur was then his contemporary, Jayasi preferred to use the event implicitly changing even the names of his characters. For various other episodes in the epic he used the sources like *Kalki Puran* and *Kadambani* of Harshadeva. It was because Jayasi was writing an allegorical epic. *Padmavat* is a fine synthesis of historic events, mythological episodes and the poet's imagination. The Ceylon

described by the poet is other than the isle of Sinhal Dweep (Sri Lanka). Some scholars however maintain that the celestial charm, the heroine of Jayasi was indisputedly from Ceylon.

Significantly, Jayasi never referred Khilji's victory over Chittor as a Muslim conquest over Hindu kingdom. He has never referred Khilji as a Muslim ruler. If ever, he called the Muslim ruler and the soldiers as Turks. Only once did he use the word 'Islam'. The poet's sympathy lay with Ratansen and Padmavati and not Khilji which is quite unusual of a Muslim poet of the time. Apparently it is the sympathy of the contemporary Muslims and Hindus toward the ruler of Chittor that finds eloquent expression in the epic. Not much later, the epic became quite popular and the bards of Rajasthan learnt it by heart. The descendants of these bards narrated the story from their memory to Colonel Todd who used the hearsay material for his history of Rajasthan. There are therefore certain distortions in his historical account. It is likely that a copy of the epic travelled in the hand of a soldier of Shershah Suri to Bihar and Bengal for it was translated into Bengali as early as in 1650.

Padmavat is thus at once a story of chivalry and romance and a work of high seriousness and nobility of purpose. The range and variety of the epic extends from the love plaints of Padmavati to the vivid pictures of ways of life, royalty, fencing, equestry, verdant world and the multiple variety of viands in royal houses. These offer a living picture of the social history of the time. As an allegorical masterpiece on physical, spiritual and metaphysical planes it reveals deep knowledge of the poet of the complex Yogic systems as enunciated in Hath Yoga:

> No battle, nor arrogance can help you win it
> You must know yourself before you conquer
> Five guards defend the nine gates of fortress
> The way to the tenth gate is not easy to traverse
> Only he who knows the mystery of the valley
> Can reach it in the form of an ant.
> Deep tunnel down the well takes you atop the fort....

The epic calls to our attention Spenser's *Farie Queene*, written about forty years later, wherein Prince Arthur leaves the palace and goes about in search of Farie Queene just as Ratansen leaves his palace in quest of Padmavati. In allegorical form both epics depict soul's union with divine grace. Both are of superterrestrial quality

employing abundantly sighs and supplications with impassioned diction in versification. And in both we find a rare versatility and artistic perfection. Yet the Spenser of Hindi poetry during these four hundred years has been set aside in the dusty corners of academic niches. The eminence of the great medieval bard needs to be resuscitated.

Mahakavi Surdas

(1478–1583)

"Where did I hear a line of Sur that overwhelmed me from head to toe" ! So runs the famous tribute that Tansen paid for the musical trait of Surdas's poetry. This underscores the high esteem that Surdas's contemporaries held for him with love and recognition. Emperor Akbar who was deeply moved by Surdas's poetry not only got his poems translated into Persian for the facility of his reading but also made it a point to visit the poet personally. The historic tryst is said to have taken place at Mathura in 1574 when the poet was 96. Akbar offered numerous royal grants including a *jagir* which the poet declined to accept.

It is not merely for the exuberant reverence which Akbar or Tansen held for the centarian blind poet that his numbers have found an everlasting place in the hearts of millions of people of Indian sub-continent. The mystery rather rests on the highest appeal that his poetry generated for the men of his time and posterity alike. True and vivid to the minutest details, Surdas's poetry wallows in simplicity and musical intensity. He is unequalled even today in the depiction of what has been called the *vatsalya rasa* (the sentiment of child affection); an extension of *nav-rasa* sequence to tenth *rasa*.

Surdas was a saint poet and as a saint poet he composed hymns in praise of Lord Krishna, portraying him as a lover and a companion *par excellence*. At the same time he excelled in erotic poetry, the erotic of separation (vipralambh shringar) wherein he speaks perhaps more eloquently the glory of divine love and philosophy of life and reality. His erotic of separation, however, is not gloomed with bemoaning. It glows even in the moments of sorrow with sharp wit and upright sallies which captured in equal measure the imagination of shepherds and courtiers of his time. Abul Fazal has chronicled him in his *Ain-e-Akbari* as the most popular poet of the day.

Fourth son of a poor Brahmin, Surdas was born in Sihi village, some 15 miles from the then Delhi on May 12, 1478. Sihi occupies an important position in Indian mythology since it was this village where the legendary Janmejaya, son of king Parikshit, performed his famous Serpent Sacrifice. Surdas was blind from birth. Some scholars however oppose this view and maintain that the poet became blind later in life. The latter contention has found few supporters. The poet's blindness caused great concern to his poverty-ridden parents and as he grew up, their attitude towards him turned increasingly cold. The poet therefore left his home and took refuge some eight miles from his village beside a pond. Here with his talent for singing and instant composing he drew large crowds and came into contact with innumerable pilgrims and folks of the neighbourhood. He was not even twenty when he had a large following. But then he soon got disgusted with this life and eventually moved to Gauhat, about twentyfour miles from Mathura towards Agra.

At Gauhat, Surdas accidentally met one day Saint Ballabhacharya, a stalwart scholar and champion of Saguna Bhakti cult

from South India. He had founded the Pushti school of religion that preached sustenance of life by Divine Grace ("Posham Tadanugraha"—*Shrimad Bhagvat* 2.10.4). The meeting brought about a dramatic change in the poet's life and raised him from a mere singer to a peerless bard. He was then thirtytwo. Ballabhacharya baptised him in his Pushti fold and took the poet along to Govardhan (Brindawan). For the rest of his life the poet lived at Govardhan in Shrinath Temple. It was here that the poet composed his immortal verses purposed to be sung at prayers. His songs were popularly sung during his life time by the folks and devotees. His *rasa* songs continue to be sung even today in and around Brindavan by the folks round the year on different occasions. Surdas's own good voice contributed a great deal in popularising his verses.

Surdas, like Homer, was an oral poet. His verses were pieced together in volumes by his followers. There are as many as twentyfour works credited to the poet. These are: *Sur Saravali, Sahitya Lahari, Sur Sagar, Bhagvat Bhasha, Dasham Skandh Bhasha, Sur Sagar Sar, Sur Ramayan, Maan Leela, Radha Raskeli Kautuhal, Govardhan Leela, Daan Leela, Bhanvar Geet, Naag Leela, Byahlo, Pranpyari, Drishtikoot Ke Pad, Sur Shatak, Sur Pachchisi, Sewaphal, Vinay Ke Pad, Harivansh Teeka* (Sanskrit), *Ekadashi Mahatmya, Nal Damyanti* and *Ramjanma*. Authenticity of these works is however yet to be fully established. Most scholars consider only three works as authentic. These are *Sur Saravali, Sahitya Lahari* and *Sur Sagar*. Even here due to stylistic differences and other reasons scholars refuse to accept the authorship of Surdas as regards the latter two works. The only work which has the unanimous approval of all scholars for Surdas's authorship is *Sur Sagar*.

Until now not more than ten thousand verses (or Padas) of the poet have been traced. Thus in quantitative comparison, Surdas's contribution is nearly one-fourth of Tulsidas who was his contemporary. But for his poetry of child-affection (*Vatsalya Rasa*) and erotic of separation (Vipralambha Shringar), his achievement has been placed above Tulsidas: "Sur is the Sun, Tulsi the Moon, Keshav the satellite and the rest of the poets are mere glow-worms emitting gleam here and there." Just as Milton would have safely retained his eminence with his Paradise Lost (which he completed in blindness) even if he had not authored his other works; Surdas's *Sur Sagar* by itself is adequate enough to secure a permanent position in the history of Hindi poetry.

Sur Saravali is a collection of 1107 verses which Surdas composed at the age of 67 in 1545. It contains some of the outlines of *Sur Sagar*. In this we learn that the poet wished to compose one lakh verses whose gist is sung in *Sur Saravali*. "Ta din te Hari leela gayee, ek lakchch pad band / Tako sar '*Sur' Saravali* gavat ati anand" (Since that day I sang the Sport of Lord Krishna (Hari) in one lakh verses whose gist is *Sur Saravali*, giving me great delight to sing). The poet was earlier exploring Knowledge to reach reality and found it led to far deeper ambiguities. It is when Saint Ballabhacharya unravelled him mystic Sport of the Lord that he realised that there was greater joy and satisfaction in the surrender and devotion than in intellectual pursuits: "Karam Yog puni Gyan upasan, sab hi bhram bharmayo / Shri Ballabh guru tatva sunayo leela bhed batayo" (I were lost in the darkness of doubts as I devoted to Karma Yoga and then Gyan Yoga, till Ballabha, the master revealed me the philosophy of Lord's Sport)—*Sur Saravali* Verse 1102.

Surdas in fact explained the difficult principles of Pushti cult of Ballabhacharya in simple verses. *Sur Saravali* therefore unfolds the poet's intellectual aspect besides his analysis of Ballabhacharya's philosophical theories. The other dimension of this work is 'Saras Samvatsar leela', the joyus song of the Lord's Sport. Enumerating at length how the creation is the offspring of Brahma's desire, the poet goes on to describe the ten sons of Brahma as well as the various avtars of Swaymbhu Manu, Shatarupa, Narh, Varah, Kapil, Prithu and the fierce battle between demons and gods which is interrupted by Holi celebration. With an obvious allusion to his allegorical design the poet underlines that creation itself is the frolic sport of Holi in which men and women are the playmates led by their leader Lord Krishna. The entire work is a long poem depicting the celebrations of Holi festival in which Lord Krishna benevolently participates in various forms.

Sahitya Lahari is a collection of 118 verses which the poet is said to have composed at the age of 79 in 1557. It is significant for poetic forms and style of the poet. Poetic inspiration rather than religious urge is the chief force behind this work. Surdas has presented in it some of the brilliant *ulat bansiyans* (poetic puzzles) as quite often used by the Sufi poets. The poet seems to be quite in tune with the contemporary vogue in poetic trend of the time. Thus we find in it the *nakh-sikh varnana* (detailed depiction of feminine beauty) which

finds later extensive treatment in the hands of Bihari, Matiram etc. This sharp departure of Surdas from his former nature of poetry is somewhat Shakespeare's departure in favour of mosques in his later works. There is also a marked display of rhetoric in *Sahitya Lahari* which became the chief concern of many Hindi poets after Surdas. According to one opinion Surdas composed this work to outrival one of his contemporaries, Nanddas, the author of *Rasamanjari*. Whatever be the purpose of this subtle literary work, it definitely succeeds to establish Surdas as the master of poetic craft which exerted a big influence on the successive generation. *Sahitya Lahari* was first published in 1892 based on the copy edited by Bhartendu Harish Chandra.

Sur Sagar is the *magnum opus* of Surdas. Divided into twelve cantos, it is collection of 4707 poems independent in theme and construction. Rich in philosophical reflections and artful subtlety of reasoning, it is an exquisite panegyric on the omnipotent and omniform Grace. The poet's fame as an immortal bard chiefly rests on the tenth canto of this work. Episodes of various avatars are of interesting variety unfolding Surdas's wide knowledge of legends and Puranic chronicles. The poet pleads and successfully resolves the supremacy of *bhakti marga* of salvation. The character of Lord Krishna portrayed in *Sur Sagar* has two aspects; his involvement in the voluptuous sports in Brij (Brindavan) and his dexterous annihilation of the demons sent to destroy him by Kansa. The epigrammatic account of Krishna's friend Udhav's visit to Brij, popularly known as the "Bhramar Geet" is the elan vital of *Sur Sagar*. In simple statements the poet bares his knowledge explicating complex philosophical doctrines that engaged the scholars in controversies. Through Udhav's ridiculous failure to convince the *gopis* (Lord Krishna's friends in Brindawan) about the logic of *Gyan Marga*, the poet proves the legitimacy of devotion, the *bhakti*, setting it beyond the reach or reason. The seemingly innocent *gopis* of Surdas argue with acrimonious repartees and strafe pungent satire on Udhav's faith in Nirguna Brahma till he finally yields to *Saguna Bhakti*. They bluntly reply to Udhav's persuasion for *Karma Yoga*:

> Udhav, who would know your yoga here?
> We, the poor women cannot know it, our husbands are alive.
> Truly we cannot practice it, we cannot keep silence.

We cannot bind the bird of our soul by pranayama.
Now tell-us-who accustomed to wear fine clothes—can
put on deer skins?
We follow none but Him, He is our guide
Whom Kubri made her garland
Please tell us when shall he return to dispel our grief?

There are two versions of *Sur Sagar* extant; first is an anthology of verses freely pieced together while the second is divided into twelve cantos on the pattern of *Bhagvat*. The similarity of canto-division with that of *Bhagvat* has evoked apprehension that *Sur Sagar* is the translation of the former from Sanskrit to Brij Bhasa. While echoes of the *Bhagvat* cannot be altogether discounted for this was the model that Surdas kept before him, it is not proper to hold that the poet's work is the *per se* translation of the former.There are obvious differences between the two works with regard to number of verses, episodes, purpose, style and the theme. Surdas does not for instance, describe his Krishna as a politician, *karmayogi* or philosopher. His *gopis* rather ridicule them who attempt to reduce Krishna in these categories. His Krishna is the simple shepherd, Brijwasi Krishna and for that matter far from elucidating Bhakti philosophy, the poet celebrates in his verses the charm and beauty of adolescent Krishna, his love making and his childhood frolics. Even when sparingly he portrays Krishna as the ruler of Dwarka, he dwells at length on the illustration of his apparels, habits etc. the aspects that would impress the *gopis* or the devotees.

There are scores of manuscripts of *Sur Sagar* in the libraries. Dr. Premnarayan Tandan has mentioned about twentyfour of them in his book, *Sur Ki Bhasa*. Publication of *Sur Sagar* began both at Lucknow and Bombay. The Bombay edition was launched by Bhartendu Harish Chandra and was completed by Radhakrishna Das.

Surdas knew Sanskrit but chose to use like Tulsidas and others, the common man's language. Surdas used Brij Bhasa in his poetry which enabled the common folks to follow and rejoice in his poetry. He made the raw Hindi dialect as the first rate literary medium and exploited its innate sweetness to the best of his expression and melody. In this respect he resembles Chaucer who found English in similar state as Surdas his Brij Bhasa and doubtlessly both poets raised their languages to great literary height. After Surdas the use of Brij Bhasa in Hindi poetry became so dominant that Grierson

was obliged to write in "The Indian Antiquary" of January, 1903: "The Hindi poetry in the western Hindi language is almost all in Brij Bhasa."

Surdas used conversational tone in his Padas which lent a unique dramtic gesture and action to his verses moving forward with sweeping flow till the end. There is no sign of distraction or obscurity in the numbers. Often a seeming doubt or query is raised by the speaker which is either satirically self-explained or resolved by the poet himself toward the close of the poem.

To which country belongs your Formless
Explain us, Madhukar. We are serious to learn
Who is his father and who the mother, who is his wife and
who the maid?
Tell us his looks, his dresses and also his tastes.
You will suffer for your foul-play, if you lie.
He stood stupified to listen. 'Sur' feels he lost his senses.

Surdas delved in the minds of mother and lover with equal success which makes one suspect whether the poet was really blind from birth:

Rejoicing comes Kanha straddling
In the emerald court of Nanda and moves about
To catch his reflection on the floor.

Such minute observations are strewn over most poems of Surdas. An instance of child frolic as the mother sings lullaby to make him sleep:

Jasoda swings Hari's cradle
She fondles, shakes and hums unwarily

* * *

Hari shuts his eyes sometimes and flickers his lips. The apprehensive mother, concerned at her child's going far to play attempts to scar him in her own simple way:

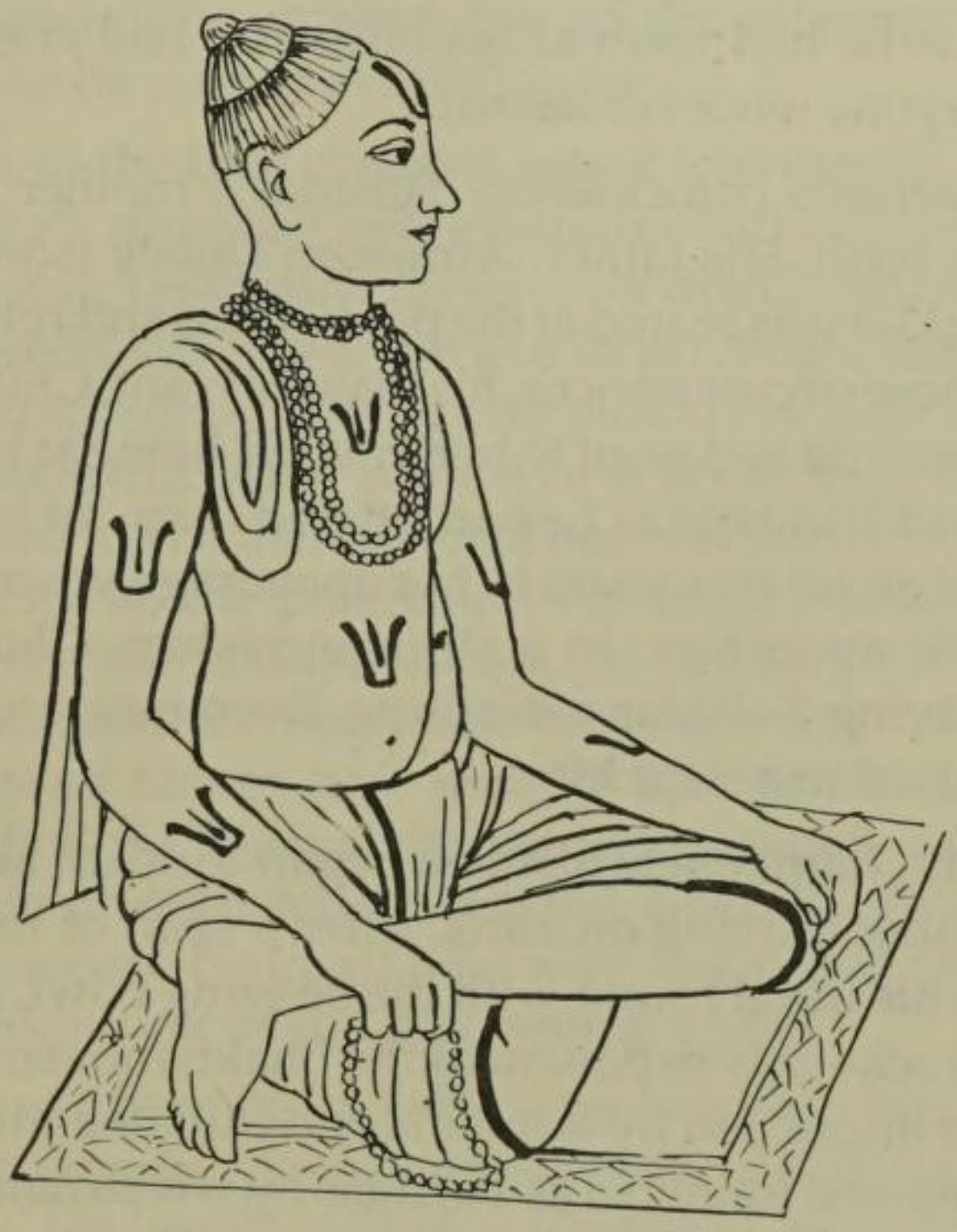
Why do you go far to play?
I heard just today, a beast strayed
Into our neighbourhood which you know not.
A lad came here gasping who wept and said:
The animal devours the ears of children.

Surdas occupies an unequal position in the history of lyric literature not only in his songs of child affection (*Vatsalya*) but also

in erotic of separation (*Vipralambh Shringar*). The minute mental states enumerated in a simple language is a characteristic of Surdas, not traceable either in Jaydev or Vidyapati. There is intensity in Meera's verses but Surdas provided vividity to the musical score. He was a prolific poet. He composed verses to sing in the prayers and he never sang his poems (padas) twice. Within the framework of his subject he portrayed life of his time almost to its entirety, the religious polemics, social customs, habits, clothes, foods, occupation etc. According to *Sur Sagar*, folks of Brindawan delighted five centuries ago in *kheer, puri, jalebi, seera* etc. just as they might do today. There are numerous other viands described by the poet like *babar, ghebar, tinghari* etc. Life described in *Sur Sagar* is of great sociological interest today.

Surdas died in 1585. Other great names in Indian poetry whose source material was chiefly drawn from Krishna's life are Jaideva, Vidyapati and Meera. Surdas among these was the only poet who lived his entire life physically in the soil of Krishna. His account of Brij life is therefore more natural, authentic and lively. That such a complete work as *Sur Sagar* is the first great work or Brij Bhasa, has puzzled the scholars of east and west. It will puzzle them more with delight when they re-explore Surdas's poetry with adequate research into Brij's past topography and poet's own life.

Goswami Tulsidas



(1497–1623)

Goswami Tulsidas is the greatest name in Hindi poetry. While some hold that he was born into a beggar's family, many maintain that he was raised by the beggars. There is, however, little disagreement that he lived his early life as a beggar boy, picking up leftovers even thrown to the dogs. The poet himself said about this in his *Kavitavali*—"Neech niradar bhajan kadar/ Kookar tookan lagi lagai" (Humbled and spurned I roamed/desperate even for bits thrown to the dogs). And again in *Dohavali,* he refers to begging: "Ghar ghar magey took puni/Bhoopati poojey payen" (Crusts of bread begging house to house/I prayed at landowner's feet).

The wretched life that Tulsidas lived in his childhood is a sad commentary on his age and the absurd superstitions of the people.

He was born at Rajapur in present Uttar Pradesh in 1497, on the bank of river Jamuna. Some believe his birthplace was an obscure village between Soro and Shookerkhet near Rajapur. The priests declared upon his birth that the child had been born under most inauspicious stars, the so called 'Abhuktmool' star, and warned the parents if ever they saw his face they would at once die. The astrologers predicted that he had boded evel signs. He would grow up a demon as he had teeth at his birth and had cried up 'Ram' shocking everyone whoever heard.

In a mysterious coincidence, Tulsidas's mother, Hulsi died soon after his birth. His father, Atmaram Dubey (some maintain Atmaram Shukla) was scared at the predictions and refused to own the child. In these circumstances, his maid servant, Chunia took the child under her care and went to her in-laws' home at Haripur. The boy was named Rambola as he had uttered 'Ram' at his birth. The child lived for about five years in her anchorage when once again misfortune fell upon him. In a strange mishap, Chunia died of snake bite, leaving Tulsidas a destitute. Even now on persuasion, his father refused to accept him.

Eventually, Rambola (Tulsidas) began to roam about the village as a vagabond living on alms. After a span of time when he was going on his usual round with the begging bowl, he met Saint Narharidas, a scholarly exponent of the Bhakti movement in north India. He was impressed by Rambola and initiated him into Brahmin fold. He named Rambola as Tulsidas by which name the world knows him until today. This is said to have happened in village Shookerkhet where according to poet's confession, he heard for the first time the story of Rama from Narharidas. Later, referring to his earlier name, Tulsidas said in *Kavitavali:* "Rambola naam, haun gulam Ram Sahi ko" (My name is Rambola/I am slave to emperor Ram).

For some years Narharidas looked after Tulsidas and gave him education. Subsequently the mentor and the ward shifted to Varanasi where Tulsidas was introduced to Shesh Sanatan, an authority on *Vedas* and *Upanishadas*. It is said Shesh Sanatan was amazed at the rare gifts and aptitude Tulsidas displayed for the scriptures. Shesh Sanatan at once took Tulsidas under his patronage and taught him *Vedas, Puranas, Upanishadas,* history and literature. The poet must have acquired a solid scholarship in these

disciplines since he studied under Shesh Sanatan for about fifteen years. But the destiny again cut short this happy patronage at the sudden demise of his mentor (Shesh Sanatan). Having nothing to look for his livelihood at Varanasi, the poet left for Rajapur. Fortunately, he was now well versed in scriptures and must have been a good authority in his village. As a religious commentator (Katha Vachak) he gave exposition of the scriptures in community gatherings and lived quite comfortably on the offerings of the village folks. He was then nearly twenty-seven.

In 1526, at the then unusual age of twentynine, the poet married Ratnavati, daughter of Dinbandhu Pathak in village Tarpita. He begot a son, Tarapati who however died in infancy. Having all along suffered utter loneliness and deprivation, the poet was passionately attached to his wife and would not bear her separation even for a moment. After some five years of their marriage when she happened to visit her parental home on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan festival, the poet could not resist running behind her. Crossing even the flooded Ganga, he reached his in-laws' home which caused much embarrassment to his wife. Whe scoffed the poet and asked him to bear love for God rather than an earthly being like her. Such repulsion and reprimand was a big jolt to Tulsidas. He at once renounced the worldly life and became a wandering ascetic (vairagi). His wife, perturbed over her impulsive behaviour took ill and died within a year.

For about fifteen years Tulsidas wandered place to place meeting and exchanging views with scholars at religious seats round the country. He finally settled at Chitrakut in Uttar Pradesh. It is here that in 1559, the famous poet Surdas, so it is said, came to meet him and showed him the poems of his magnum opus *Sur Sagar*. It is again here that the poetess Meera Bai wrote to him for advice. Tulsidas is said to have advised her to follow the divine path fearlessly. This bears an evidence that Tulsidas had earned by now a good deal of fame and admiration as a saint and poet. Already, Abdul Rahim Khankhana, the famous poet in the court of emperor Akbar had bestowed the highest honour on Tulsidas when he said: "Godh liye Hulsi phirey/Tulsi so sut hoi" (Fondling in her arms Hulsi roams/ Everyone wishes to have a Tulsi like child). We may more appreciate the spirit of Rahim than dispute his historical inconsistency.

Tulsidas lived at Chitrakut till 1572 and composed major portion of *Ram Gitavali* and *Krishna Gitavali*. He then left for Varanasi

with a brief sojourn on way, at Varipur and Digpur where he composed some of his poems. In Varanasi he is said have been inspired by Lord Shiva to write the famous epic, *Ram Charit Manas*. This prompted him to visit Ayodhya to have first-hand knowledge of the seat of Lord Rama. He commenced his epic here in 1574. He was then 77. He completed it in about two years' time. During 1576-1583, he wrote his second great work *Vinay Patrika*, a collection of lyrics.

The rancorous puritans of Varanasi created numerous problems for Tulsidas being jealous for his success and fame and even conspired to burgle the manuscript *Ram Charit Manas*. Alarmed of the impending theft Tulsidas kept the copy of the epic in the custody of Todar, a rich landowner of Varanasi. It is for this help that on the death of Todar the poet drafted the famous deed on the division of property among his sons (*panchnama)* though he had vowed never to write anything on mortal subjects. This event took place in 1612. The copy of the *panchnama* is still preserved in Varanasi. Tulsidas would have faced even greater problems from the Shiva worshipping puritans (Shaivites) which he escaped for his shrewd declaration of Lord Shiva's inspiration for the epic.

Tulsidas wrote in all twelve books though scholars like Prof. Grierson attribute to him seventeen books. Prof. Grierson's view is disputed. The books are: *Ram Charit Manas* (1574-76), *Vinay Patrika* (1583), *Dohavali* (1583), *Parvati Mangal* (1586), *Krishna Gitavali* (1586), *Vairagya Sandipni* (1586), *Ramagya Prashna* (1612), *Barbai Ramayan* (1612), *Ramlala Nahachchu* (1612), *Kavitavali* (1616), *Gitavali* (1616), and *Hanuman Vatuk* (1642).

In 1613, emperor Jahangir is said to have visited Tulsidas and offered him royal pension. The poet however declined to accept. Earlier too, when emperor Akbar had offered him Mansabdari, a coveted position those days, the poet had politely refused saying: "Ham chakar Raghuvir ke patab likhe darbar/Tulsi ab ke hoingey nar ke Mansabdar" (I am in service of Rama to sing his praise/How could I serve a mortal any more). The poet spent a major part of his later life at Asi in Varanasi. He suffered from terrible ailments in his old age. Due to exhaustive mental work he had developed acute neuralgic pain in his arms. Gradually the pain spread all over and made him restless. The poet has described this agony in *Hanuman Vatuk*: "Paon peer, pait peer, bahu peer, muh peer/Jar jar sakal sareer peer bhai hai" (Pain in the arms, in the legs, stomach and

even the mouth/Pain all over this skeletal frame). It is here that in August 1623 Tulsidas breathed his last. Thus the poet who faced the threat of virtual death at his birth, lived an incredible 126 years.

Tulsidas's fame soley rests on his epic *Ram Charit Manas* and the volume of lyrics *Vinay Patrika*. Historically, the epic was written at a time when England did not have any epic. Spenser had to attempt it twenty years later and *Beowulf* was more Teutonic than English.

The story of Rama that Tulsidas took for his epic *Ram Charit Manas* was drawn from different sources. Two main sources were the *Ramayana* of Valmiki in Sanskrit and *Vayu Purana*. Tulsidas has given a huge list of other sources of Rama story. According to Sanskrit scholar Aswa Ghosh, the Rama story was first written by Saint Chwavan which was used by Valmiki for his epic composed anytime during 600 to 400 B.C. But Valmiki himself hinted in his "Bal Kand" to an earlier work "Makhyanam *Ramayanmiti* Shrutam". While Valmiki described Rama not as a God incarnate but an ideal man, in *Vayu Purana* Rama was deified for the first time. Tulsidas took his cue from the latter work quite as he made use of other works like Kalidas's *Raghuvansam* and Bhupati's *Ram Charit* (1285). By the time of the poet the Rama story had travelled all over the country an instance of which may be seen in the Bengali version of *Ramayana* by Shankar Dev who died in 1568. All the same, Tulsidas made several changes in his plot and justified on the ground: "Kaal bhed se kathya bhed" (change in the story due to change of time).

In *Ram Charit Manas* Tulsidas appears as a social commentator, theologian and a poet par excellence. He has given his sharp observations on socio-political and religious conditions of his time. He had witnessed the political upheavals during the successive reigns of the Lodhis, Mughals, Afghans and back again the Mughals. He had also seen from close quarters the plight of common men under the misrule in the battle for thrones. The epidemics of 1556 and 1573-74 had whetted the miseries of the people yet further. He describes how the morals had vitiated at every level and the profanity and anarchy were at their height: "Kou nahi maney anushashan", he said. (No one observes discipline). Commenting upon the opportunists and pseudo scholars he said: "Soi sayan jo par dhan haari/Jo kar dambh so bada aachari" (The vainglorious are cultured/And wise are those who rob others). He also commented upon the corruption of the affluent and the state

officials. His observations are attested in the report of a Dutch traveller, Trancisco Pelsaert who wrote of the time:".... Governors are usually bribed by the thieves to remain inactive.... So much is wrung from the peasants that even dry bread is scarcely left to fill their stomachs." Even during the time of Akbar the masses did not escape misery which is however sketchily recorded by Abul Fazal in his *Ain-e-Akbari*. In his exhortations to the people and the rulers, Tulsidas manifestly dreamt of an ideal state like that of the Ram Rajya.

As a work of theology Tulsidas more than succeeds in his mission. The *Ram Charit Manas* is pre-eminently a religious treatise. It offers a detailed eulogy of Lord Rama as incarnation of Lord Vishnu. In doing so he did not confine himself to the singular aim but covered almost every aspect of human life from, plebians to the rulers. To set ideal models he created characters who excel in respective relationship like the ideal king, the sons, brothers, friends, servants, admirers and so on. Thus presenting a vast amalgam of life in its entirety, the poet also resolved the religious controversies of his time. The two major controversies during his time related to the approaches to God. The Nirgun Bhakti cult whose chief exponent was Saint Shankaracharya (9th century AD) from south, advocated that God was formless (Nirguna) and the external world was mere illusion. In this philosophy of *Advaitvad* (Non-duality), the Being could identify with God (Brahma) through knowledge. Manifestly this drew upon Samkhya Yoga of *Bhagvat Gita*. On the other hand there were followers of Saguna cult expounded by another philosopher also from South, Saint Ramanujacharya (12th century AD) who preached the doctrine of devotion (Bhakti) to reach God. He conceived Brahma as a personal God comprehensible in form (Saguna) in the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. This cult was further promoted by Ramananda (14th century) who conceived God as an ethical personality. Down to this age the Saguna Bhakti cult is more popular with the masses than the Nirguna cult. While poets like Surdas and Meera Bai wrote in praise of Saguna Bhakti cult, Kabir Das advocated the Nirguna Bhakti; his Rama being formless. Though chiefly propounding the Saguna Bhakti acceptable to the masses, Tulsidas brought about a synthesis of the two : "Sagunahi, agunahi, nahi kachu bheda" (There is no difference between form and formless). He thus satisfied both the schools and brought a harmony. But his greatest contribution is to establish Lord Rama as an incarnation of God

which is upheld by millions of people down to our time. No other poet in the world has exerted such a tremendous and lasting influence on the religious beliefs of the people.

Yet above all *Ram Charit Manas* as Tulsidas named it is a great epic. The poet did not entitle this work as "Ramayana" as is popularly known. This epic is divided into seven 'sopans' (steps on a wharf) which the people call as 'Kandas' (Cantos). These sopans are the Bala, Ayodhya, Aranya, Kishkindha, Sundar, Lanka and Uttar. Each canto begins with prayers and comments in Sanskrit. The first canto describes the greatness of Lord Rama and the circumstances which led to his incarnation. The famous battle between Rama and Ravana is depicted in the Sixth canto. In the Seventh canto Lord Rama returns to Ayodhya and rules as an ideal king bringing peace and prosperity to the people. Tulsidas concludes here. He did not write the Love-Kush episode so elaborately shown in TV serial in India sometime ago. He only hinted about the two princes: "Dui sut sundar Sita jaye/Love Kush ved-puranan gaye" (Love and Kush were born to Sita/As sung in the scriptures). The appendage of Love-Kush episode and certain other additions were the mischiefs of the interpolators who trifled with the original text to suit their own interests.

Even as poetic ingenuity and talent in *Ram Charit Manas* and other works are quite magnificent, Tulsidas averred himself no poet:

"Kavi na houn, nahi chatur prabinoo/Sakal kalag sab vidya heenoo/Kavitt vivek ek nahi mohey/Satya kahu likhi kagat korey." (I am no poet nor knower of the art/I am devoid of wisdom, knowledge/I have none of the ingenuity/or talent for verse/To tell the truth/I just scribbled on blank papers).

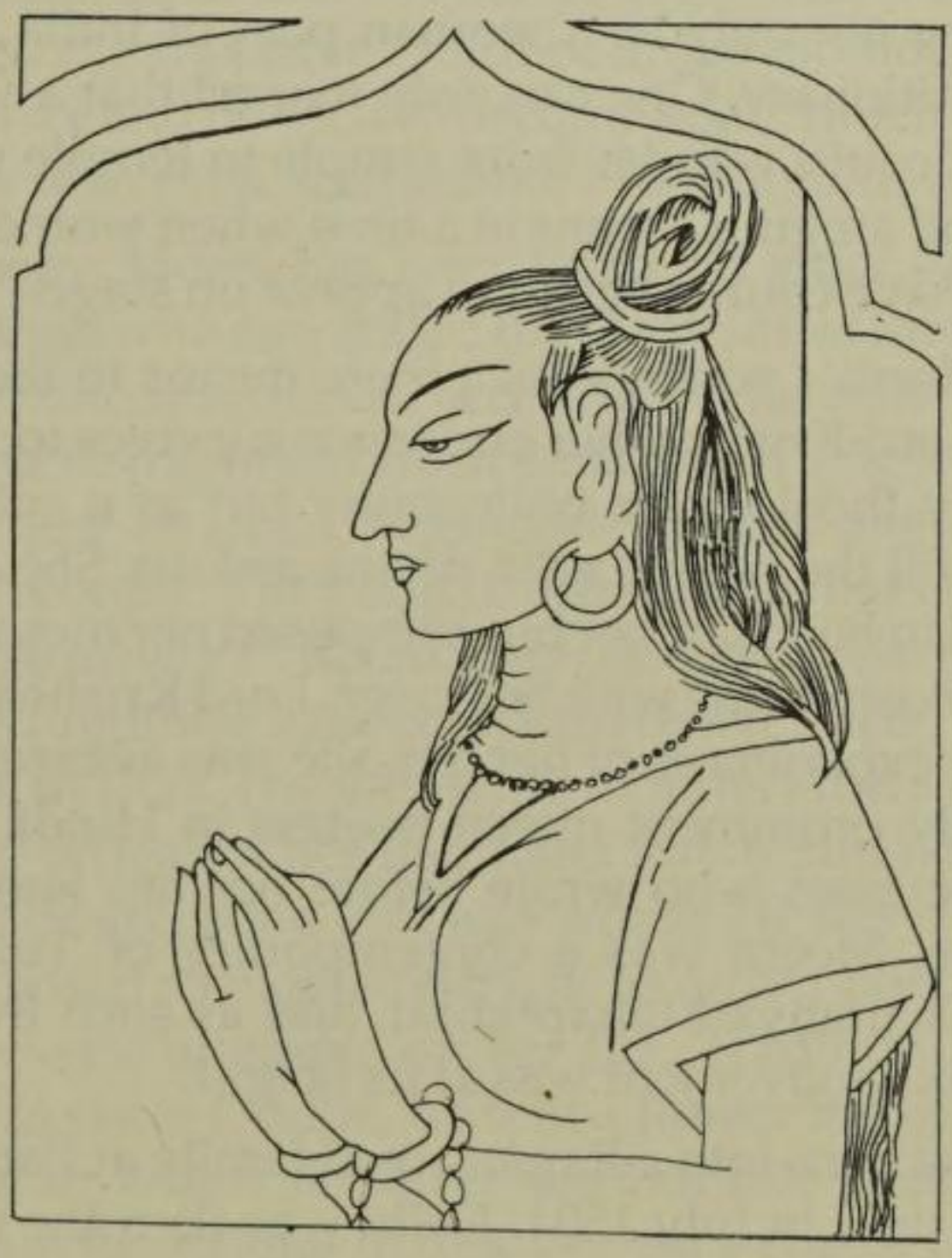
But that is the humility of the greatest of the poets who said he wrote the epic for self-satisfaction "Swant sukhaye Tulsi Raghunath gatha" (I wrote the story of Rama merely for self-satisfaction).

The forms of versification used in *Ram Charit Manas* and other works prove Tulsidas's wide knowledge of the prosody. He used doha, chaupai, chchapai, rola, sabaiya, padas, tomar, etc. displaying an extraordinary achievement yet to be surpassed. We are still amazed at his metric variety, the spontaneity, restrain, brevity and the sophistication of the expression which exalts the readers at every line. The poet used Avadhi for the epic which is a dialect close to Khariboli Hindi though he also used Brij Bhasa in other

works. He chose appropriate styles for his different themes like the bardic style in "Sundar" and "Lanka" cantos of the epic, pada style in *Gitavali* and *Vinay Patrika* and even the style of the Stylistic (Riti Kalin) poetry. He wrote lyrics and folk songs in *Parvati Mangal* and *Janki Mangal.*

The great influence that Tulsidas exerted upon the millions of people through his epic compelled V.A. Smith to note in his book, *Akbar, the Great Moghul:* "Tulsidas was the greatest man of his age in India—greater than even Akbar himself in as much as the conquest of the hearts and minds of millions of men and women affected by the poet...." The well- known orientalist Prof. George Grierson also observed in his *Indian Antiquary*: "He is one of the three or four great writers of Asia... over the whole Gangetic valley his work (*The Ramayana*) is better known than the *Bible* in England." Few would rise to this pinnacle of glory as Tulsidas did from a beggar boy to an epic bard.

Meera Bai



(1504–1546)

Harold Nicholson, explaining Gautier once remarked that the poetic gift is a rare and precious talent which "must not be bartered for any wordly advantage." None perhaps refused to barter as daringly as the medieval Hindi poetess, Meera Bai for whom love and poetry were synonymous. It would be blasphemous of course to search earthliness in her love which she refused to bestow even on her husband.

This sixteenth century rebel poetess of Rajasthan never came to terms with anything in life which her contemporary society valued. She was misunderstood, scoffed and humiliated during forty years or so of her life but has been adored down the centuries

after her death. She is the first and the only saint poetess of distinction in Hindi. She differed from other saint poets like Kabir and Surdas who belonged to humble families and had to accept a life of poverty and seclusion more by compulsion than choice. Belonging to an illustrious royal family of Rajasthan, Meera Bai had no such compulsions for discarding the luxuries of palace life other than her own uncompromising ascetic principles. Revolting against the palace, she rubbed shoulders with the plebians and created history not only as a woman poet of India but also as a spirited revolutionary. One can only marvel that a woman and a queen to boot could wander from temple to temple with hermits, composing and singing hymns at a time when women even in the west did not have courage even to appear on stage.

Even if Meera's poetry was a mere means to the devotion of her beloved Lord Krishna, her eminence survives today not in the context of any theology or philosophy but as a sublime lyricist whose songs fill the people with divine ardour. She did not write with any quill in her chamber but composed her mesmerising lines only to sing or commune with her lover, Lord Krishna. Undeterred by the galling experiences of her life, she was as carefree as Kabir. She is the only prominent queen poetess in Hindi. None of the seventeen poetesses who wrote before her are known today as widely as she. Meera was a contemporary of Tulsidas, Kabir, Surdas and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and as such lived at a time when the Bhakti movement was at its height.

Meera was born into a Rajput royal family at Pandu village in Medta, some time in July 1504. Delhi was then the ruling seat of Lodhies. Her great grandfather, Rao Jodha Singh, who is credited with founding the imperial town of Jodhpur had granted a Jagir of twelve villages to her grandfather, Rao Doodha Singh. In 1462, Rao Doodha Singh founded Medta and subsequently made it his capital. Meera was the daughter of Rao Doodha Singh's second son, Prince Ratan Singh. She lost her mother in childhood and was reared by her maternal aunt who lived in the nearby village of Kudki.

Meera was married at the age of twelve to Prince Bhojraj, the eldest son of the famous Sisodia King of Mewar, Rana Sanga. Incidentally one of the early rulers of Mewar had earned great literary renown as a poet, critic and playwright and had written one of the finest commentaries of the *Geet Govindam*. A spell of gloom fell on Meera when around 1523, her husband died. A few

years later, her father-in-law, Rana Sanga was severely wounded fighting the Mughal invader, Babur and succumbed to his injuries. Earlier, her father, Rao Ratan Singh had died fighting bravely in the battle of Panipat. These cataclysmic upheavals in her family were keenly felt by Meera and made a deep impress on her mind and poetic sensibility. She was nearly twenty then.

According to the tradition of time, soon after widowhood Meera was required to end her life by self-immolation to become a Sati. Rebel as she was from childhood, she did not see any sense in this orthodoxy and refused to become a Sati, much to the chagrin of her in-laws who even accused her of immorality.

In her poems Meera has referred to her elder brother-in-law, Rana Ratan Singh who succeeded the throne after the death of Rana Sanga. For her unconventional access to the hermits she met much opposition and ill-treatment from Rana Ratan Singh. Her relations with him became strained as is evident from one of her poems wherein she records: "The bond of our relation has come to an end (Jeth bahu ko nato nahi)". Ratan Singh however ruled for only three years. He died fighting against his maternal uncle, Surajmal, the ruler of Bundi in 1530. The following months Meera was to undergo most bitter ordeal of her life. Rana Ratan Singh's cousin, Vikramaditya who succeeded him was worse. He never let her live in peace and imposed stringent restrictions on her poetic activity. He even made several attempts on her life. Tradition has it that, in league with his sister Oudha, he sent a flower basket containing a poisonous snake which however did not bite Meera and rather slipped out quietly. Failing in this, he sent a cup of poison by way of Prasad which Meera is said to have swallowed but miraculously survived. She referred to this incident in a poem:

Why must I not hate your palace, Rana?
You sent me the cup of poison to kill
Lo, I drank it as the offering to my Lord

* * *

I wouldn't die of your killing, Rana!
My protector is someone else.

Such agonising experience, far from deterring her from her avowed mission, sharpened a great deal her poetic sensitivity upon which her genius most thrived. She had unshakable endurance and was much emboldened to go about freely in the company of

hermits and compose her songs. Hearing the charge that she was a stigma on the family and that for unconventional act she was discarded by whole Mewar, she mocked at the people in no uncertain terms in one of her songs:

> I have lost all shame in the company of hermits
> and kicked at dynastic glory
> I care a hoot for the people.

Noticing her traumatic experience in Mewar her elder uncle, Rana Biram Dev who was then the ruler of Medta took her to his palace in 1531. Rana Biram Dev and his son Jayamal were quite impressed by Meera's poetic gifts and let her live the religio-poetic life the way she wished. For about seven years Meera continued with her poetic work undisturbed. But she was again in trouble in 1538 when her uncle lost his kingdom. Meera then resolved to go on a pilgrimage and visited Dakar Pushparaj, Brindawan and finally took shelter in Dwarka, once the seat of Lord Krishna. She died in 1546 in the temple of Lord Krishna.

Meera was independent not only in life and poetry but also in her religious pursuits. Unlike the vogue of her time she did not align herself to the Bhakti movement. She had faith in the 'Saguna' God and in a platonic manner chose to see her imaginary lo -, Lord Krishna in tangible form. The major theme of her poetry is the reverberation of ideas and feelings that a lover experiences in eternal union with the beloved. She did not bemoan her sufferings, nor did she shed tears at 'separation' but expressed her dilemma in vigorous terms.

Numerous legends have clustered around Meera's lifelong quest for Lord Krishna as a lover (not of a devotee for God). It is said that, once watching a marriage procession she demanded of her mother to tell her who was her (Meera's) bridegroom. As she couldn't be satisfied with the answer, the mother showed her the idol of Lord Krishna and said, "Your groom is Lord Krishna". Meera, it is said believed thereafter none but Lord Krishna to be her husband and even after marriage clung to that faith relentlessly. "My husband is Brijwasi Krishna," she said in a poem where she added, "Wordly marriages are fake that are made only to be ruined." She is said to have protested sharply at the time of her marriage to Bhojraj.

There are some five hundred songs which Meera composed, none of which were however anthologised in her lifetime. These

were in the possession of the hymn singers (bhaktas) in the temples and were transmitted to succeeding generations mostly by word of mouth. It is therefore, not surprising that a large number of poems not actually composed by Meera have been passed off under her authorship. From nearly a dozen books attributed to Meera, only one volume, *Meera Ki Padavali* has been considered authentic. All her poems are primarily lyrics and set to different ragas meant to be sung on different occasions and at various times of a day.

Coming into contact with the wandering hermits, Meera imbibed a large number of words from different regions which she used without inhibition in her songs. The use of a colloquial idiom in her lines made them appeal to all and sundry from different states. It is for this reason that her songs are popular in most of the western, northern and north-eastern states. She drew upon the use of two or three-syllable words:

Jogi, mat ja, mat ja, mat ja
Paon Padun mein tere

* * *

Meera ke prabhu Girdhar Nagar
Dooja hoi na koi.
(Don't leave me O wandering hermit
I pray thee on knees.

* * *

Meera's lord is Girdhar Nagar†
None else)

As literary creation was her secondary aim, Meera did not attempt any *Khand Kavya* (long poem) or *Maha Kavya* (epic). She composed almost in a state of trance and poured out mostly the stirrings of her soul. It is quite remarkable that she still displayed a plausible picture of life and society. It is her supreme achievement to have compressed, within the confines of a lyric, experience and thoughts of varied range both personal and universal. She explored both the aspects of love, union and separation though the latter is the cardinal theme of most of her poems. Deep and poignant, her lines bear the tenderness of a woman's heart at the same time as they manifest vigorous defiance of social norms literally trampling them underfoot:

† One of several names of Lord Krishna.

None dare come in my way,
I go enchanted,
Kicking aside the glories of my ancestors.

Yet Meera was not merely a poetess of sensuous devotion. Her flights of imagination, thoughts and reflections are strewn in many poems. In some such poems the critics have attempted to trace the impact of Sufism and of Yogis. They point out the obvious parallels of Mahboob in Krishna. The elements of Navdha Bhakti cult in her poetry they say, come close to the Sufi stages of salvation like *shariyat, tarikat* and *marfat*. Similarly from innumerable allusions, they aver that she had intimate knowledge of *yogic* practices particularly Hathayoya, as in lines from one of her poems:

Trikuti mahal mein
Bana hai jharokha
Tahan se jhanki lagaungi.
(There is a window in the Trikuti palace from where I shall escape).

Meera lives for us today as the finest of lyricists who could sing her love for an eternal spouse. She was animated with a divine faith and never allowed her voice to be throttled. She composed in a spontaneous surge, throwing overboard the poetic, social and religious laws of her age. In that she was perhaps the most vigorous woman of medieval times who challenged her age as Emily Dickinson did in our time when she said :

I took my power in my hand
And went against the world.

Keshav Das

(1561–1621)

No medieval poet has been as much cursed and praised as Keshav Das who belonged to the age of Akbar and Jahangir successively. Like Chand Bardai and Vidyapati and most Riti poets he enjoyed court patronage. But then he was less powerful than Bardai in the political affairs and dabbled in it only when called upon by his patron rulers. His sole mission was to eulogise his patrons in which lay his personal benefits of a prosperous living. Poetry was his profession to please the rulers whose allegiance he shifted with each succession. It was thus he enjoyed the patronage of Chandrasen, Ram Shah, Ratansen, Indrajit Singh, Veersinghdev and Amar Singh who were except one (Ratansen) the successive rulers of Orchcha.

Keshav Das was a scholar poet and so rigorously did he apply the rules of rhetoric that he seems to have written only to exemplify his rhetorical knowledge and power. He was a trend-setter of Riti poetry. The ruling passion of the Riti poets was the delight they took in the formal aspects of poetry. The high language and, prolixity of figures the seeds of which existed in Bardai earlier were carried by these poets to extreme limits. Poetry became in their hands far too contrived, laboured and shoddily artificial. Yet Keshav Das has an historical significance in Hindi poetry for his artistic ingenuity and rhetorical richness as well as the metric variety.

Keshav Das was born in 1561 in Orchcha, some seven hundred kilometres south-east of Delhi in a Bharadwaj family. He was too proud of his high birth. He mentioned about his dynastic glory in *Rasik Priya* wherein we learnt that the poet's forefathers were great scholars of Sanskrit. And though he doesn't speak about his own education, it is amply evident from his works that he was no less educated than his forefathers. Besides literature and poetics he had abounding knowledge in music, religion, astrology, medicine and politics. He was grandson of Krishna Dutt and son of Kashi Nath. His brother Balbhadra Mishra too was a scholar and a poet though of lesser repute. Orchcha is in Bundelkhand region in central India (now Madhya Pradesh) which was ruled by Bundellas for many centuries. Around 1530s, a Bundella king, Rudrapratap Singh made Orchcha his capital. It was during his time that Krishna Dutt, the poet's grandfather who hailed from Kumbher was appointed to give discourses on *Puranas* in the palace. Rudrapratap Singh's successor, Madhukar Shah continued the patronage to Krishna Dutt's son Kashi Nath, the poet's father. Keshav Das were three brothers, the other two being Balbhadra and Kalyan Das.

Keshav Das mostly lived in Orchcha and seldom toured round the country. He visited on occasions, Agra, Allahabad and Udaipur. In his last days he seems to have offended his patron, Veersinghdev and had to leave Orchcha. He went to Mathura, Varanasi and then to Mewar. He was restless at all the places and finally decided to settle at Allahabad. He had five sons: Bihari Das, Shri Prasad, Vishesur Dayal, Jahdev and Anantram. Not much is known of his wife except that she was alive till his last days. Keshav Das died at Allahabad in 1621.

According to Colonel James Todd who wrote the history of Rajasthan, the first patron of Keshav Das was Chandrasen, son of Maldev the ruler of Jodhpur who was alive till 1585. The poet's next patron was Indrajit Singh, the ruler of Orchcha whom he eulogised in *Kavi Priya*. "Kalpa briksha so dani din, sagar so gambhir/Keshav shooro soor so, Arjun so randhir." (He—Indrajit Singh—is as charitable as the bounteous Kalpa Tree*, as profound as ocean, as courageous as Sun and as valiant as Arjuna...). The poet also confessed that he wrote *Rasik Priya* on the inspiration of Indrajit Singh. His other patrons were for brief periods.

It was Veersinghdev, one of the eight sons of Indrajit Singh who patronised the poet for a fairly longer period. He figures in *Ain-e-Akbari*. He was friendly to prince Jahangir (Salim), son of emperor Akbar. The poet sang the glory of his patron in his *Veersinghdev Charit*.

Keshav Das was familiar with the political luminaries of his time among whom were Maheshdas Dubey, popularly known as Birbal and emperor Akbar's revenue minister, Raja Todermal. It was due to such acquaintance that he once saved Indrajit Singh from the wrath of Akbar. The poet seems to be also acquainted with Abdul Rahim Khankhana, the renowned poet of his time in the Mughal court. The poet had a large following though he is silent by and large about them. He only speaks with gusto about Praveen Rai, the dancer in the court of Indrajit Singh on whom Akbar is said to have taken fancy. She loved music and art and also composed verses occasionally. Keshav Das wrote for her his *Kavi Priya*, his landmark in poetics.

The dominating concern of Keshav Das was perfection and stylistic richness; the traits that later characterise the Riti poetry in Hindi resembling almost with English classical poetry that was to flourish more than a hundred years after Keshav Das.

The Riti poetry in Hindi was in some respect influenced by later Sanskrit works authored by such poets who were more scholars than poets. Most Riti poets in fact translated into Hindi the works of Sanskrit poetics and Keshav Das was no exception which again reminds us of English classical poets especially Alexander Pope and his *Essay on Criticism*. Unfortunately two books said to have been authored by Keshav Das, one of which has

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* The mythic tree that fulfills all ambitions.

been even identified by Lala Bhagwan Deen as *Ram Alankrit Manjari*, are not traceable. In Sanskrit the importance of figures and the rules of poetic composition are traced back to Bharat's *Natyashashtra*. Bharat however mentioned only upama, rupak, dipak and yamak (simile, metaphor, allegory and pun). In *Agni Purana* of Ved Vyas there is mention of fifteen figures (alankaras). However the first to make a detailed study of this subject was Bhamah in the sixth century A.D. In his *Kavyalankar Sutra* Bhamah also refers to the earlier rhetoric tradition especially that of Meghavin. According to Bhamah there were thirtyeight figures of speech in poetry. He considered the figures as the principal part of the poetry. He did not differentiate between sentiment and emotion (rasa and bhava) and included both in his figures like *rasavat* or *urjaswit*. Bhamah was followed by Dandi in the seventh century who in his *Kavyadarsha* enumerated thirtyfive figures about which he said: "Kavyashovakaran dharmalankaran panchakchhatey" (beauty and grandeur of poetry is manifestly the figure). Unlike Bhamah, Dandi considered the hyperbole and not the irony as the soul of poetry.

Udbhat in the eighth century based his *Alankar Saar Sangrah* chiefly on the principles enunciated by Bhamah. The most important rhetorician in the successive generation was Rudrat who partly differed from Bhamah and enumerated as many as fortyone figures. Among the rhetoricians of the successive period were Mammat, Bhoj (11th century), Rajashekhar, Hemendra (12th century), Vidyadhar (14th century) etc. Mammat who was the foremost of these scholars counted in his *Kavya Prakash* seventy figures while disapproving the practice of judging poetry by merely figures.

Keshav Das who assimilated the influences of all these predecessors himself commented on the rhetoric principles and the importance of figures in his *Kavi Priya* in which he elucidated thirtyseven figures (alankaras). Thus both as a rhetorician and a poet he almost dominated his age so much so Bihari, the second great Riti poet is oftenly considered his son being capable to write just as Keshav Das would have liked a poet to do. But Bihari being the son of Keshav Das is as presumptuous as Surdas being the descendant of Chand Bardai.

Referring to the works by Keshav Das, scholars like Ramchandra Shukla, Dr. Ram Kumar Bhramar etc. reached the con-

clusion that the poet authored seven books viz., *Rasik Priya, Ramchandrika, Kavi Priya, Veersinghdev Charit, Vigyan Gita, Ratanbawni* and *Jahangir Jaschandrika.* The eminent Riti scholar Vishwanath Prasad Mishra however included two more books in the list which are *Chchandmala* and *Nakh-Sikh.* This has been by and large accepted by most scholars.

Keshav Das said he wrote *Rasik Priya* on the request of Indrajit Singh. Written in 1591, it is a versified rhetoric following Sanskrit pattern. The book in sixteen cantos deals with the principles of sentiment (rasa), characters, heroes and heroines. There are divisions and sub-divisions of the nature of heroes and heroines. The heroines he says are of four types: padmini, chitrini, shankhini and hastini. Though these divisions are not found in Sanskrit poetics, there is reference about them in *Kamshutra.* Heroines are further divided into multiple types. Keshav Das mentions as many as eight types of heroines. He advised the versifiers to chose Shri Krishna as the ideal protagonist. Of the nine sentiments (rasa), he considers the Sringar (the erotic) as the foremost to illustrate which Lord Krishna is the best choice. He dealt both the sentiment of union and separation in *Rasik Priya.*

Erotic depiction is the crowning theme of *Nakh-Shikh* written in 1600 which demonstrates how women beauty should be portrayed in poetry. Describing the beauty of women, it deals with as many as thirtynine aspects of woman body from head to toe illustrating distinct charm of each part, the feet, bosom, arms, face, voice, cheeks, eyes, hair, dresses etc. The poet delineates beauty of these parts through numerous similes and figures and so the woman make-up and the apparels. Written in fifteen cantos it is a study of woman beauty as well as the figures of speech in poetry. The poet claimed that he had no influence of Sanskrit sources in this work. *Ramchandrika* is the *magnum opus* of Keshav Das which he said was written in 1601: "Sorah sai atthvna katik sudi budhwar/Ramchandra ki chandrika tab leeno avtar." The Vikrami era of 1658 mentioned by the poet corresponds to 1601 AD. The poet says he was inspired for this epic by the sage-poet Valmiki in a dream. Written in thirtynine cantos (prakashas), it is based on Jaydeva's *Prasanna Raghav* in Sanskrit, *Ram Charit Manas* of Tulsidas in Avadhi and some other Sanskrit sources. The poet however cuts short most of the episodes dealt at length by his

predecessors, for instance the entire episode relating to the birth of Dashrath's sons and their early childhood is rounded off in a single rola (stanza of sixteen lines). Rest of the story follows more or less on the pattern of Tulsidas ending with the crowning ceremony of Lord Rama and the Love-Kusha episode. The poet delights profusely in the display of figures and his rhetorical talent with arbitrary use of diction:

Mudrit samudra saat mudra nij mudrit ke
Aai disi disi jiti sena Raghunath ki.
Naad poori dhoori toori ban choori giri
Sokhi sokhi jab bhoori thal gath ki
Keshav Das aas paas thauri rakhi jan
Tinaki sampati sab aapney hi haath ki
(Thundering they marched demolishing mountains
Raising dusts, drying waters, they spread all over
Their fame, and conquering lands they seized their
Wealth and kept their governors to rule
Stamping their feet on earth
The triumphant troops of Raghunath marched.)

The epic manifests the poet's talent in the fullness of its maturity. Departing from traditional divisions into *sargas* it is divided into *prakashas*. There are thirtynine *prakashas* (cantos) in the epic. However laboured or pedantic Keshav Das's glory rests mainly on this epic.

The eulogical works that Keshav Das wrote are : *Veersinghdev Charit, Jahangir Jas Chandrika* and *Ratanbavni*. The date of the last work is controversial. It is generally accepted that it was written after *Ramchandrika* and before *Veersinghdev Charit*. It is a collection of fiftytwo verses describing the battle of Ratansen with emperor Akbar. Ratansen was the son of Madhukar Shah, the ruler of Orchcha before Indrajit Singh. Historically the battle seems to have been fought in 1580. There are some historical inconsistencies in the work. Linguistically it is much closer to Apbhransa and seems to have been influenced by *Prithiviraj Raso* of Chand Bardai. It is considered one of the minor works of the poet.

Among the eulogical works, *Veersinghdev Charit* written in 1607, is an ambitious enterprise. About its greatness the poet remarks: "Navrasamai sab dharmamai, raajnitimai maan/Veer-charitra bichitra kiya Keshavdas praman." (It is replete with nine

sentiments (nava rasa), all religions, politics and glory / Keshav Das wrote with all these the wonderful life of Veersinghdev). The poet's claim of *nava rasa* in his work is far too tall since it scarcely contains the Shringar (erotic sentiment). Describing the political turmoil of Orchcha during Veersinghdev, it is written in thirtythree *prakashas*. Veersinghdev offended emperor Akbar in supporting the rebel prince Jahangir (Salim). He laid siege on the forces of Abul Fazal and killed the latter. Consequently his principality of Orchcha was ransacked and he was forced to flee to the forests resorting to guerilla battle. Upon the death of Akbar when Jahangir ascended the throne, the latter restored the kingdom to Veersinghdev and even granted him Tin Hazari Mansabdari, the honour to possess three thousand mounted troops.

The early portion of *Veersinghdev Charit* deals with the rivalry between Veersinghdev and his brothers following victory of the former. There are animated account of the battles of Veersinghdev. The latter portion deals with equestry, watersport, dances etc. The theme is developed through the dialogues of Daan (charity) and Lobh (avarice) whose dispute is resolved by the intervention of Veersinghdev in his court. These two abstract characters represent Birbal and Todermal respectively. The poet employs many human impulses in allegorical perspective in the characters of Prem (love), Vijay (success), Dhairiya (patience), Anand (joy) etc. The work has historical significance of contemporary politics and society.

In the other eulogical work, *Jahangir Jas Charit* (1617), the poet employs similar scheme and style of *Veersinghdev Charit*. Two characters, Udyam (enterprise) and Bhagya (destiny) debate over their respective importance. At the instance of Lord Shiva they reach the court of Jahangir to settle the dispute. He eulogises Jahangir through these characters as also through others. Intervening dispute, Jahangir gives his judgement: "Karam phaley udyam karey / udyam karmhi paay / Ekai dharam duhun ko, Keeno bidhina dai" (Only the destined are enterprising / Same virtues adorn the both). Within this framework the poet portrays the life of Agra town. Even Jahangir gives his account of historical and topographical knowledge in the work. With astounding command of language the poet makes massive use of figures quite as he displays his range of metric variety.

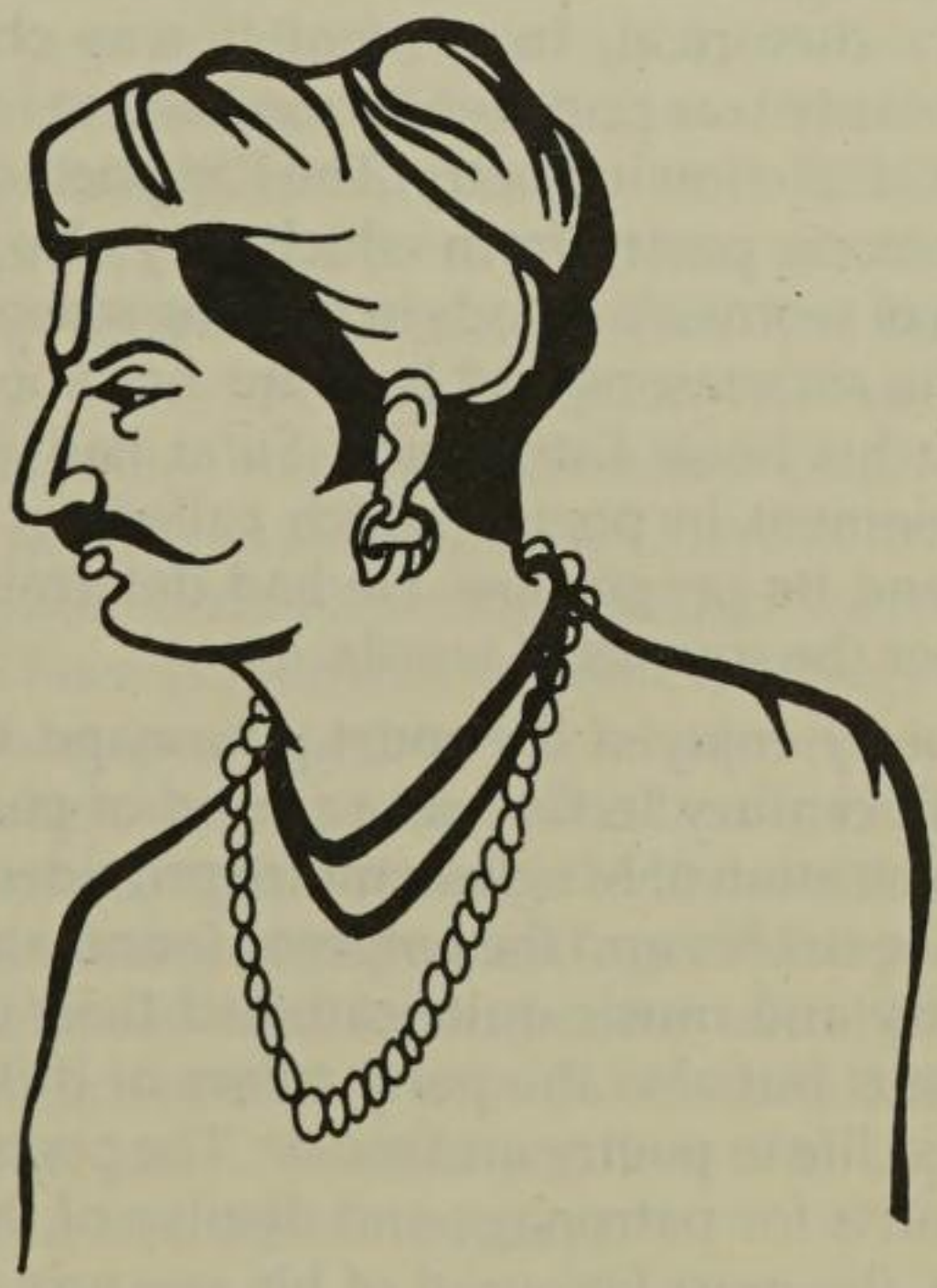
During the writing of *Ramchandrika*, Keshav Das may have been also working on the verses of *Kavi Priya*. Both the works were

completed in 1601 though *Kavi Priya* appeared later. The poet wrote this work to impart lessons on poetics to Praveen Rai who was lover of his patron Indrajit Singh. About her artistic talent the poet says: "Naachat gaavat padat sabai bajaabat veena/Tinme karan kavitt yak Rai Praveena" (She plays instrument, sings, dances and reads too/But then Rai Praveena also writes verses). The poet had earlier written *Rasik Priya* to please his patron Indrajit Singh. He wrote *Kavi Priya* to please his mistress, (Praveen Rai) and in that to please the patron himself. In his work he gives an introductory guidance on poetics and stresses on the rules and principles of poetry which he insists should not be violated. He furnishes lists of words to be avoided and the lapses a poet must guard against at all costs. He gives a detailed account of figures, characters, heroes and heroines and mentions three categories of poets; uttyam (noble), maddhyam (common) and adham (lowly). He places poets writing eulogy in the second category and thus he gives an impartial assessment of his own position as a court poet. He believes figures are the charm and soul of poetry. "Bhoosan bin na birajai, kavita banita mitt" (Poetry, women and nature do not look well without decoration). He devotes as many as eight cantos (prabhavs) on the elucidation of figures. The book is written in sixteen cantos.

Keshav Das did not belong to any sect. His love for *Gita* was for intellectual and spiritual satisfaction. He pleaded for a harmonious course of life. In his old age he turned from earthly to eternal. It could be also due to his differences with Veersinghdev which were later reconciled. On the bank of Triveni at Allahabad he was deeply influenced by *Pravodh Chdrodaya* and wrote *Vigyan Gita* for self-purification and knowledge in 1617. Written in twentyone cantos (prabhavs), it is developed through dialogues, narratives, critical commentaries, character portrayal and prayers. The poet deals with religio-spiritual matters and seeks to give his own solution. In the first twelve cantos he writes on the clash between attachment and reason. In the subsequent nine cantos he pleads for an enlightened synthesis. "Jab vivek hati moh ko hoi pravodh sanjyat/Tabahi jaano jeev ko jag me jeevan mukt" (When reason and attachment are blended in enlightenment/It is then the soul attains salvation). As in fifteenth canto, the poet attaches great importance on self-purification. The work however is more of receptive eclecticism enlivened with contemporary moral values.

Even as Keshav Das directed his poetry to a specific purpose, literary value of his works and their technical excellence cannot be doubted. This is despite his pedantic, superficial and rhetorical displayism in writing. The range, scope and vitality of his writing are so forceful that he is considered one of the three great poets of medieval India; the other two being Surdas and Tulsidas. One may object to his eloquence from rhetorical pulpit but his corpus of writing forces a compulsive recognition for which none can afford to ignore him while talking of Riti poetry in Hindi.

Bihari



(1595–1662)

English Classical poetry thrived on closed couplet as the main vehicle of poetic expression. This was carried to a towering height by Alexender Pope. In Hindi poetry however the closed couplet saw its golden era nearly half a century before the English Classical period.

This was in the age of Bihari (1595-1662), the foremost of Riti period of Hindi poetry which also shared some of the features of English Augustan Age. Such traits were in the emphasis of polished diction (best exemplified in Keshav Das), choice of urban world, indulgence in women's vanity and superficialities. The poetry of Keshav Das could not make any popular appeal for his

preference of hard diction. Bihari however drew large audience for his simplicity and use of diction from spoken language. *Satsai* was the common form of poetry during this period for which the Hindi poets looked to Sanskrit classical models. For most part, the poets spoke in general and therefore we do not have any celebration of a character equal to Belinda of Pope.

Riti means style and therefore the Riti poetry is highly stylistic. In view of its significance attached to embellishments it turned out also highly rhetorical. In content it was chiefly erotical. The women's beauty was portrayed from head to toe which was called 'nakh-sikh' depiction in poetry. The Riti poets owed this feature to Sanskrit rhetoric poetry from which they also drew the emphatic co-relation of woman's moods in varying seasons. They invariably describe the six seasons and how the heroine responds to them. Bhamah in his book *Kavyalankar Sutra* had upheld style as the supreme element in poetry which called for specific quality of language and its proper use. He had determined the use of language as per the sounds of words.

Riti poetry enjoyed the court patronage. Comparatively, the seventeenth century India was a period of peace and prosperity. The administration of Mughal empire provided a good measure of stability. The nobles and the emperor found ample time for enjoyment. Poetry and music quite satisfied their urges. Not only the Mughal court but also the petty rulers of different principalities also enjoyed life in poetry and music. The poets eventually looked to these courts for patronage and display of their genius. Among such poets, the most favoured of his age was Bihari. His place in poetry solely rests for his *Satsai* which means a volume of seven hundred verses. But Bihari's *Satsai* contains seven hundred and nineteen couplets written on various themes, chiefly amorous.

Bihari referred to his name once as Biharilal. He also referred once as Bihari Das. For lack of authentic information and doubts expressed in these allusions, the scholars hold by and large the poet's name as Bihari. There is similarly controversy regarding the poet's parentage, birth and native place. Without going into details of the controversy we may lend agreement to what the scholars have generally accepted. The poet was born in erstwhile Gwalior state in 1595. This was also the region of the famous singer Tansen's birth. A Brahmin by caste, Bihari belonged to Chaturvedi community. Some scholars have confused his father Keshav Rai with the famous seventeenth century poet, Keshav Das. The poet has

made no specific mention about this fact which, if true, he would have never been silent about. Nor do the historical accounts corroborate to this view. In fact as the facts suggest, Bihari saw the poet Keshav Das for the first time when he was there. This was when his family had shifted from Gwalior to Orchcha where Keshav Das lived.

It so happened that while in Orchcha, Keshav Rai one day proposed the poet Keshav Das to be the tutor of his son, Bihari. Quite willingly the poet taught the prodigy for some time. This however abruptly ended. Keshav Rai after some time left Orchcha and settled with his family at Brindawan. Here Bihari received education under Narhari Das, a hermit scholar whom his father had known earlier at Orchcha. In fact Narhari Das had also requested Keshav Das, while at Orchcha, to teach Bihari. With the help of Narhari Das, Keshav Rai began to make enough earning to maintain the family fairly well at Brindawan. Here he arranged the marriage of his daughter. Soon Bihari too was married in a reputed family in Mathura. This was followed with the marriage of Bihari's younger brother in Mainpuri. Keshav Rai whose wife had passed away some years earlier, was now free of his family encumbrance. He quite devoutly turned to religion and even became an ascetic as most people did those days in advanced age. This upset the poet who felt utterly lonely. He lived for sometime with his in-laws at Mathura. His experience of living with the in-laws was not very happy. Wrote the poet later: "Should you live with in-laws/you must lose your honour like the winter days."

Bihari continued to be the protege of Narhari Das and visited his home quite often at Brindawan from Mathura. It is said in 1618, emperor Jahangir, accompanied with the crown prince Shah Jahan paid a visit to Narhari Das. Shah Jahan who had learnt Persian and Sanskrit, was fond of poetry and arts. He was so charmed with the poetry of Bihari who happended to recite his verses in honour of the visiting emperor, that he at once invited the poet to the court. Shah Jahan had already patronised in his court, poets like Sunder, Doolah and Kulpati Mishra. He was also the patron of the famous Sanskrit scholar, Pandit Jagannath.

When Prince Dara was born in 1620, Shah Jahan held a splendid Darbar at the capital, Agra, to celebrate his son's birth. As many as fiftytwo rulers of different princely states are said to have attended the function in which Shah Jahan introduced Bihari to the

royal guests. Bihari recited his poems and quite impressed the audience. On the desire ˙ Shah Jahan, the rulers also fixed annuities to the poet. At Agra, Bihari benefited more than being just a court poet. Here he befriended among others, the famous poet, Abdul Rahim Khankhana whose couplets on mystic themes are held in great esteem down today. Khankhana was the son of Bairam Khan who had played a pioneering role in the foundation of Mughal empire in India. (It is unfortunate that Khankhana was later stabbed to death by Shah Jahan during the latter's rebellion against the emperor, Jahangir). Khankhana was exceptionally charitable to the poets. He is said to have been so fascinated by one of the *chchapais* (stanza of six couplets) of the poet, Gang that he offered him a gift of thirtysix lakh rupees. He was also charmed with one of the couplets of Bihari on whom he showered his gold coins. The poet (Bihari) was virtually submerged in the heap, as the legend goes. The couplet is said to be in praise of poetic genius of Khankhana. Poets like none better than those who laud their works and Khankhana was certainly far too exceptional. But then he had resources too to be so charitable.

Shah Jahan revolted against the empire in 1621 on the issue of succession since his step mother, queen Noor Jahan favoured her son Sahar Yaar as the crown prince and influenced the emperor against Shah Jahan. Threated by the formidable Mughal army, he had to flee down south to save his life. Under such disturbed state of political climate at Agra, Bihari felt wise to leave for Mathura where he lived till 1631. Back home he utilised the time writing poetry and studying the classics and the works in Brij Bhasa.

In 1635, Bihari visited Jaipur to collect his annuity. The ruler of Jaipur, Jai Singh who had just married a pretty girl was so much in her spell that he had forsaken the affairs of his principality. He had even issued strict orders not to disturb him however serious be the cause. This was quite unusual of Jai Singh who was known for his victories in several battles and who later exerted much influence in the political affairs of the Mughal empire. It was he who later succeeded to bring about the peace treaty between Chchatrapati Shivaji and Aurangzeb, successor to Shah Jahan. The nobles and the generals of the Jaipur court were thus much disturbed at such strange juvenile behaviour of their ruler. This also greatly alarmed the head queen of Jai Singh, Maharani Anantkuwari. She was the daugher of Shyamal Das of Karoli and was also known as Chauhani Rani. She feared that the neglect of the administration

may result in seizure of the principality by the emperor. Hence she was delighted more than any one when the news of Bihari's visit reached Jaipur. She was sure Jai Singh dared not offend the poet of the Mughal court and would certainly come out of his private chamber to meet and hear the poet. Such was the power the poets wielded in the medieval times in the country!

On learning the situation, Bihari decided not to announce his arrival to Jaipur ruler. Instead, he sent him a couplet (like Vikarnitamba in Sanskrit) to serve him a warning. The couplet he composed for the occasion was: "The desperate bee hums round in a miserable bid/Wait for his plight when the bud blooms!" The poet further took care not to send the couplet directly to his patron. He rather handed the paper to the flower girl who alone was allowed to visit the royal chamber to deliver the flowers each morning. When the flowers were strewn over the bed, Jai Singh noticed the paper and read the couplet. Having heard him many a time before he realised its author could be none but Bihari. It shook him from his torpor. The fact was, the state of Jaipur was given to Jai Singh on the plea of queen Jodhabai, wife of emperor Akbar. On her behest Jai Singh was also conferred upon the title of Mirza and was known as the Mirza Raja. Jai Singh now feared that the poet's one word against him in the court could spell disaster. He at once withdrew from his chamber and resumed his princely duties. He invited Bihari to his court and pleased him with numerous gifts. He even begged him to stay at Jaipur and assured him of all help for his poetic works. The poet stayed on and commenced his *Satsai* in 1635. The poet was then 40. His resolve to stay at Jaipur immensely pleased Chauhani Rani since of all it was Bihari who had finally succeeded to place Jai Singh on right track. She offered various gifts to the poet and granted the 'jagir' of a village, Kala Pahari. She also got a large portrait of the poet made which is still preserved in Jaipur Palace.

In the meanwhile Chauhani Rani gave birth to prince Ram Singh in 1643. The occasion was celebrated with great splendour. The poet was again honoured and showered with precious gifts. When the prince grew up, Bihari was appointed as his tutor. For the purpose of his education, Bihari compiled a collection of five hundred couplets which happen to be one of the earliest specimens of children's literature in Hindi. However, part of it is too heavy to the children to digest. Bihari completed his *Satsai* in 1647. That was

the year Jai Singh brought victory for emperor Aurangzeb in the battle of Balakh which has been alluded in the *Satsai*. The poet was then 52.

In the following years Bihari underwent a deep spiritual transformation. He lost interest in worldly affairs and decided to leave Jaipur for Brindawan. He had no children and had adopted his nephew, Niranjan Krishna whom he left under the care of Ram Singh at Jaipur. He settled at Brindawan where he died in 1662.

Satsai drew a large readership and listners and became instantly popular in the northern heartland. With the public interest growing in the *magnum opus* of Bihari, several commentaries were written to explain meaning of the verses to the people. The first ever commentary was written by Niranjan Krishna in 1663. A commentary also appeared in verse written by a certain Krishna Dutta. There are today more than fifty commentaries of *Satsai* which has been translated into Urdu and Persian. Besides, there are two translations in Sanskrit. Bihari chose the prevalent form of couplet and excelled in it. For an audience looking for instant pleasure, the couplet provided an effective medium. There are conflicting views as to who first arranged the *Satsai* in chronological order. Some consider this was got done by Azam Shah, son of Aurangzeb.

Bihari was not the first poet, as said earlier, to write a 'Satsai' in Hindi. There are several instances in Sanskrit of 'Satsai' tradition. Amruk wrote only hundred slokas and became immortal for his *Amruk Satak*. The "Durga Saptshati" in *Markendya Purana* contains seven hundred couplets in Sanskrit. There are other works like *Aryasapta Shati* by Anand Vardhanacharya, *Gathasapta Shati* by Satvahan and *Bhamini Vilas* by Singh etc. Among the 'Satsai' work in Hindi are *Rahman Shatak* and *Matiram Shatak* named after the respective authors. In our own century, Viyogi Hari wrote *Vir Satsai*. As it is, 'Satsai' as a form provided ample freedom to piece together the independent verses rather than to write the entire work on a definite theme. This category of poetry is Muktak Kavya or independent verses (not free verse since the couplets are rhymed and have a definite metric pattern). The entire work of saint poet, Surdas or that of Mirabai falls in this category as does for instance Tulsidas's *Gitavali* or *Krishna Gitavali*. However, Surdas and Tulsidas used various forms whereas Bihari chiefly confined to doha or the closed couplet.

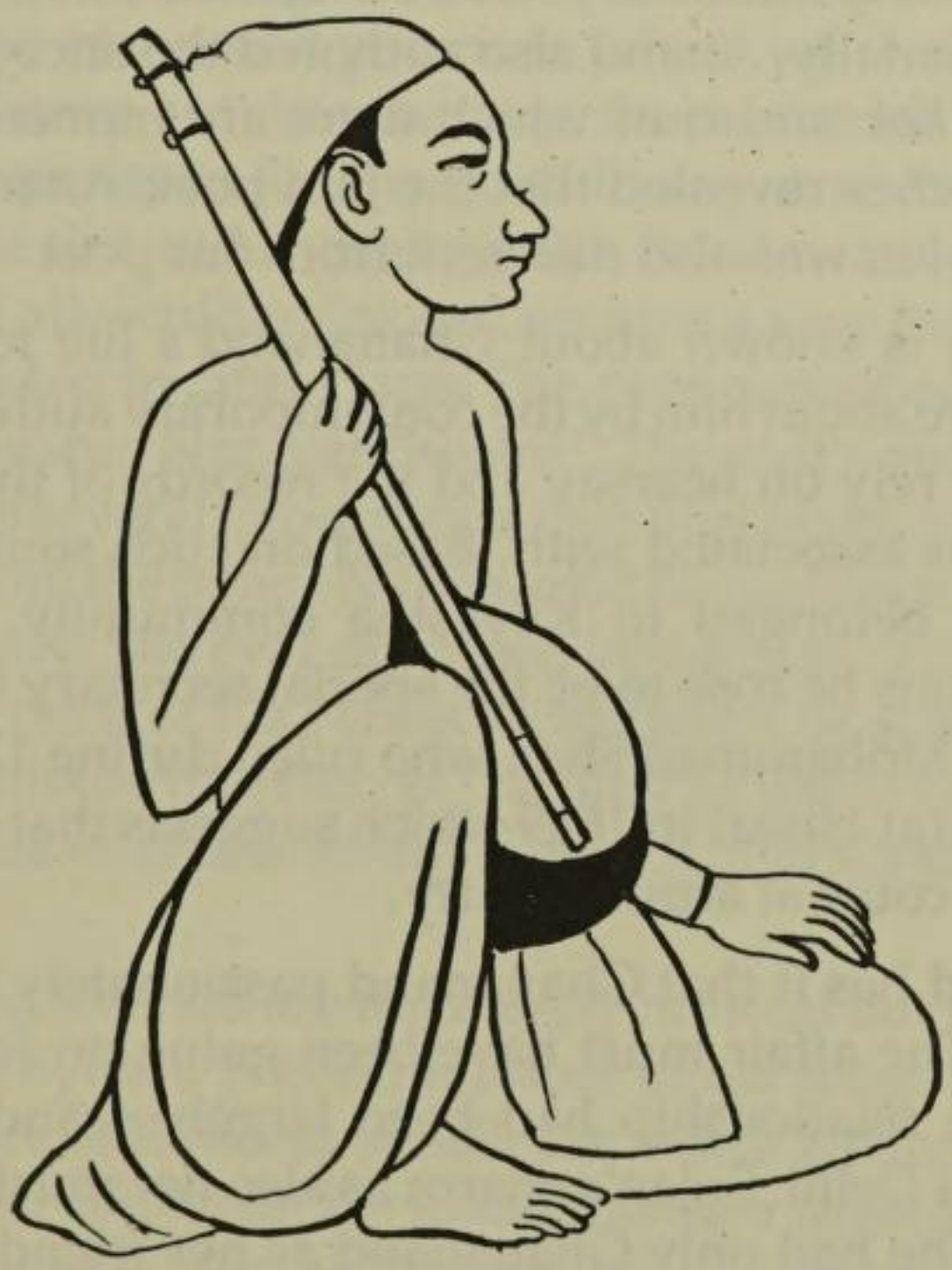
Bihari was thoroughly a product of his age and studied closely the medieval life into which he was born. He was a perfect court poet and had a first-hand experience of court manners and the urban world as reflected in his poetry, without which he could not succeed. The poets those days vied each other singing praise of their patrons and more often than not many of them exaggerated the heroic valour and the glory of the patrons. Bihari did not indulge in such eulogy. In the entire *Satsai*, there are only nine couplets in praise of Jai Singh. With great gusto and pungent humour he rather satirised the life and manners of his time. His satire is directed through the characters and the situation which affords a unique objectivity to the poet. Talking about the rusticity of the rural life, one of his characters comments: "The cityman lost his grandeur/settling among the village brutes/who talk of city life and ridicule." In yet another instance: "No use trading in elephants in this wretched village/For here live only potters and washermen/Aren't you aware?"

As a court poet, Bihari's prime concern was naturally to entertain his patron and nobles of the court. The courtiers who had an organised life with ease and comfort, enjoyed the gossips about women and wine. They took delight in satire and humour rather than on religious and philosophical issues. Bihari satiated their urge in his satiric portrayal of women, at once sensuous and lascivious. He pictured women in various moods, gestures, outfits and their love affairs in sensuous details: "The slim maid wearing Panchtoria cast such spells/As a lamp would glow in wave behind a thin screen of water fall." Panchtoria is a thin sari weighing not more than hundred grams. Another striking simile, for aquiline eyes of a beautiful woman: "Through the opaque veil glisten her eyes/As though a pair of fish sparkle in cool clean Ganga." Bihari delighted in amorous depiction of women in her gay moments rather than in her grief or what is called the *Bipralambh Shringar*. Thus women of charm and affected sophistication became the pivotal centre of his poetry. Though the appearance drew the greater focus, the poet painted quite patiently the mental states of his heroine with salutary effect. Nature found place in his poetry in as much as it affected the heroine's moods. The poet described, following the tradition, all the six seasons of the year. The colour and sound effects created in his poetry is hardly traceable in other poets of his age.

Although Bihari used chiefly Brij Bhasa and Avadhi, he did not hesitate to use words from Urdu, Persian and other north Indian dialects. There is no surprise therefore that such words as, *ahsan, chasma, kabool, hamam, payandaj* are found in his poetry. He also used Bundelkhandi in which he was educated in childhood. The richness of language charged with hitting irony and intensity of feeling is not found elsewhere, not even in Matiram who was almost his contemporary or even in Dev. He used the couplet (doha), the legacy of Apbhransha literature where this form was used with great success in chivalric verses. Bihari achieved his excellence with his unique symmetry in composition, elegance and the brilliant gift of phrasing since the form demands uncommon brevity of expression. His couplets are remarkable for their dazzling effect and at the same time for frivolous splendour.

Bihari's allusions to varied subjects bear testimony of his wide knowledge and experience in different fields. His frequent allusions to medicine led some to believe that he practised medicine. Incidentally his experience with the physicians was not a happy one and he did not miss any opportunity to satirise them. Picture of an impotent physician: "He charges his patient heavily and assures to cure him of impotency/His wife stares at his face and smiles for his like ailment." Bihari's allusions to astrology and religious tenets acquaint us with the general understanding of these subjects by the medieval people. Packing a world of ideas in his just two lines with simplicity and spontaneity, Bihari remains an unequal spokesman of stylistic (Riti) trend of poetry in Hindi poetic history.

Ghananand



(1689–1757)

When the vast Mughal empire ruthlessly consolidated by Aurangzeb was crumpling under the rule of voluptuous monarch, Mohammad Shah, there lived in his court a poet, Ghananand who wrote melodious verses that have raptured lovers of classical music down the ages. Betrayed by his beloved and oppressed by the king, he turned to God and sang pangs of his wounded soul identifying his love with God. His poetry with odour of earthly love has a divine purpose. Poetry in his hand thus became a serious object rather than the art of sexual evocation as practised by the Riti poets of his time. In his middle age he turned ascetic and it is the voice of a sage and deceived lover that is eloquent in his verses.

Before Hindi literary historians finally settled on the identity of Ghananand, there was much controversy about the poet confusing him with Anand Ghan, Ghan Anand and even Anand. It misled Prof Grierson to believe that Anand the author of great Hindi musical work, *Rag Kalpadrum* and Ghananand were the same person. This misconception was demolished by the researches of Kashi Hindi Pracharini Sabha who discovered that there was a difference of nearly hundred years between the existence of the two persons. Incidentally, Anand also authored the once popular book on sexo-logy, *Kokmanjari* of which there are numerous versions. Further researches revealed that the Jain poet, Anand Ghan who authored *Chaubisi* was also different from our poet.

Not much is known about Ghananand's life too as there is scarce literature about him by the contemporary authors. The early writers had to rely on hearsay and the records of the temple and the sect he was associated with. Based on such sources it is held that the poet belonged to Kayastha community. Rising from humble positions he rose to be the special secretary (Kalam Khas) in the court of Mohammad Shah who ruled during 1719-1747. The poet was born (at Hisar) in 1689 which suggests that he must be in the emperor's court at around thirty.

The legend has it that Ghananand passionately loved a courtesan, Sujan. The affair must have been going on for quite some time since the relationship had been largely scandalised in the social circles of Delhi. Sujan's charm as also her musical voice was well known. She had only Ghananand as her friend which led to jealousy of the courtiers. To enjoy the mockery, the courtiers conveyed to the emperor that Ghananand sang lucidly. The emperor who knew that he was puppet in the hands of the ministers and could not assert his voice had relegated all powers to them and chose to spend time in dance, music, women and wine. For such habits he is known in history as Mohammad Shah 'Rangila'. He also composed verses. He now expressed desire to hear the poet sing. But even on his persistent request, the poet declined to sing. The courtiers advised the emperor that the poet would sing only before his lady-love, Sujan. The courtesan was brought in the court and on her request the poet sang rapturously. Sujan too sang with him but facing the poet with her back to the emperor. This was against the court courtesy. The courtiers pleaded with the king that the poet showed a blatant disrespect to the court by honouring the

wish of the courtesan and not the emperor. Convinced of the argument, the emperor banished Ghananand from Delhi.

For Ghananand it hardly mattered whether he lived in Delhi or else where so long he was in the company of Sujan who was his main inspiration. He asked Sujan to accompany him but the worldly-wise courtesan refused to be his consort. The poet who had all along believed, according to her own confession in some of her verses (she also composed poems to which we shall return later) that she loved none but the poet, was shocked to his senses. It was a traumatic experience for the poet. In any case he had to leave Delhi which he did and chose to make Brindawan his next home. He renounced all worldly ties and became a sage (sadhu) of Nimbark sect founded by Shri Hans. The poet described his lord as a swan "Hans swarup Narayan Swami". The poet's own master, Shri Brindavan was several generations after Shri Hans. Yet, despite his detachment from the bonds of the world he could not forsake Sujan from his memory. She ever remained in the back of his inspiration as reflected in most of his verses on temporal or spiritual themes. In common with the tradition of the time he wrote on the erotic of Krishana-Radha relationship but it is often interacted with his love for Sujan.

Ghananand's verses are not merely musical but well set to the beat of dance-rhythm. A good number of his songs are recited in the performance of Rasleela (a ballet in which Krishna and Radha are the main participants). He loved Rasleela from his young age and is said to have borne the expenses of its performance in Delhi on most occasions. It was this association with the Rasleela group, that drew him to music and in course of time he became a good singer himself. In the process, he befriended Sujan whom the chronicles describe as a prostitute. For his intimacy with a woman of such low repute, the poet was scandalised and bitterly condemned in society. Vishwanath Prasad Mishra quoted a contemporary poet who called Ghananand a bad character and ruffian. The poet bore all this calumny quite patiently. It is said Sujan too composed verses. At least eleven Kavitts (eight line verse) traced in Azamgarh are said to have been written by Sujan. In these verses she declares her love for Ghananand: "This is my humble appeal/please listen what I say/sometime if you can/be generous to come to me". In yet another poem she insists for his love: "Having loved once do not show me your back/please bear upon

your heart this request." It is evident that Sujan did show at some stage her devotion to the poet. Apart from her physical charm and virtue of her music, the poet's love for her must have been whetted by her poetic gifts. And earnest in his love, he was prepared to pay any price for her and he did give evidence of it which though entirely changed the course of his life from courtly prosperity to bardic immortality.

Living exiled in the company of the sages at Brindawan, Ghananand composed his verses celebrating grace of Lord Krishna as incarnation of God (avtar). Like other devotees, God for him was personal, in form of human being, loving and being loved by mortals rather than an invisible cosmic force. The philosopher poet Nagridas who was a contemporary of Ghananand showed great respect to the latter. His fame as a poet and musician had spread among the people and according to one account even Nadir Shah who invaded Delhi in 1740, had a desire to hear him. The poet declined to visit the royal court. He wrote in his verse:

The emissaries came after long to urge me
visit the royal court
Insisting they tried to lure me to the
reward-promising invitation
They hardly knew that Ghananand was
no longer what he were once
He has already lost heart for a friend
playing foul.
The flame of life is now flickering...

Some historians had earlier believed that the defiance of the poet had offended Nadir Shah who ordered that the poet's arms be chopped off which resulted in his untimely death. It has been now established that Ghananand in fact died in the first invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1757. It was during this invasion that Abdali after plundering Mughal capital, Delhi, marched his troops to Mathura and Agra for loot. Abdali's forces which ransacked Mathura also attacked the temples in search of gold and silver massacring people indiscriminately. The hermits dwelling in these temples offered some resistance but had to give in before the mighty power of the invader. Most of them were butchered to death. It was in this attack upon the people of Mathura by Abdali that Ghananand was killed. During his second invasion after Panipat battle of 1761, Abdali returned from Delhi and did not

move south to Mathura. Ghananand was therefore killed in the first invasion of Abdali and not the second as is popularly held.

Ghananand did not bother to collect his verses in volumes. The titles of his works therefore, as we have today, are those of the compilers. One of his earliest compilers was Brijnath. Uncertainty also prevails about the magnitude of his canon. According to one estimate he authored as many as forty works of which some are just a verse-length. Kashi Nagri Pracharini Sabha ascertained some seventeen works supposed to have been authored by Ghananand.

These are:

Ghananand Kavitt
Anand Ghan Ke Kavitt
Kavitt
Sfut Kavitt
Sujan Hit
Anand Ghanjo Ke Kavitt
Sujan Hit Pravandh
Kripakand Nivandh
Viyog Veli
Ishkalata
Jamuna Jas
Anand Ghanju Ki Padavali
Priti Pawas
Sujan Vinod
Kavitt Sangrah
Raskeliballi
Brindavan Sat

This list is however of synthetic value. Subsequent researches have revealed that certain works credited to Ghananand are in fact not by him. For instance *Brindavan Sat* was authored by Bhagavan Mudit and not by Ghananand. There are numerous other collections under different titles featuring the poems of these works. The major works of the poet which enjoy unanimous agreement of the scholars are: *Sujan Hit, Kripakand, Prem Patrika* and *Padavali.*

Ghananand's poetry is chiefly of two category: devotional and amorous (Shringar). In the devotional poems Lord Krishna and his Brindavan are the dominating themes. The poet approaches God through the logic of his reasoning and seems to suffer from an eternal separation. Subtly, there is a constant quest for the union of the soul with the God. The poet raises various moral issues and calls for the purification of the self for the enlightenment that will lead to divine union. "Most difficult is to meet the God/O heart full of evils, first clean up yourself for the tryst." He saw the relationship of soul with God as a lover which he expressed through different symbols:

> Life source like the wonder of Sujan is ever invisible
> Where did the clouds hover while Chatak famished for a drop.

Ghananand thus had all the traits of Sufi poets with the basic difference of *rasa* embodying his verses.

At the time of Ghananand's advent of Hindi poetic scene, the amorous poetry, the dominating theme of the Riti tradition had been grotesquely defiled by vulgarity. The poets vied each other portraying the sordid love affairs of the protagonists whom they reduced to sort of wicked creatures. They even did not spare the symbolic love of Krishna and Radha whom they brought down to the level of animal passion. Without registering any open protest Ghananand in fact turned the table and chose the loftier side of love as a consequence of which his poetry intimates us the philosophy of love rather than the carnality of love so exhuberantly written by the Riti poets. Unlike his contemporaries, Ghananand had no urge for court patronage and therefore no need to satisfy their vulgar tastes. He as such refined the poetic sensibility of his age and depicted love something as sacred. For him there was no room for crooked means in love matter. It is a simple course:

The path of love is pretty plain
There is no curve, no turn anywhere
One may straight walk unmindful of himself
Only the wicked demur and reach no where.

The poet stressed in several verses that the real love always inspires for nobler purpose. It always sublimated the soul. He wondered if the people who sang or heard his verses ever gave thought to such credo:

This is plain truth and far too clear
Love always raises man to greater peaks
People who hear may just aspire to try
But only those with intellect will enjoy
The skilled lost their heads and deceiving
As they did, wrote verses for common herds
They alone understand the verses of Ghananand
Who see love through the eyes of heart.

Ghananand wrote the erotic poetry both of *sanyog* (union) and *viyog* (separation) though he wrote more about the latter in which he shows greater felicity and intensity. In either he expressed sincere and powerful emotions of his protagonists. It is notable he makes his protagonist speak herself rather than employing an interpreter in form of maid or companion as in the Riti poetry. His verses therefore do not seek to dazzle but leave a placid taste as

chaste as the dew drop when his youthful protagonist just bares her heart:

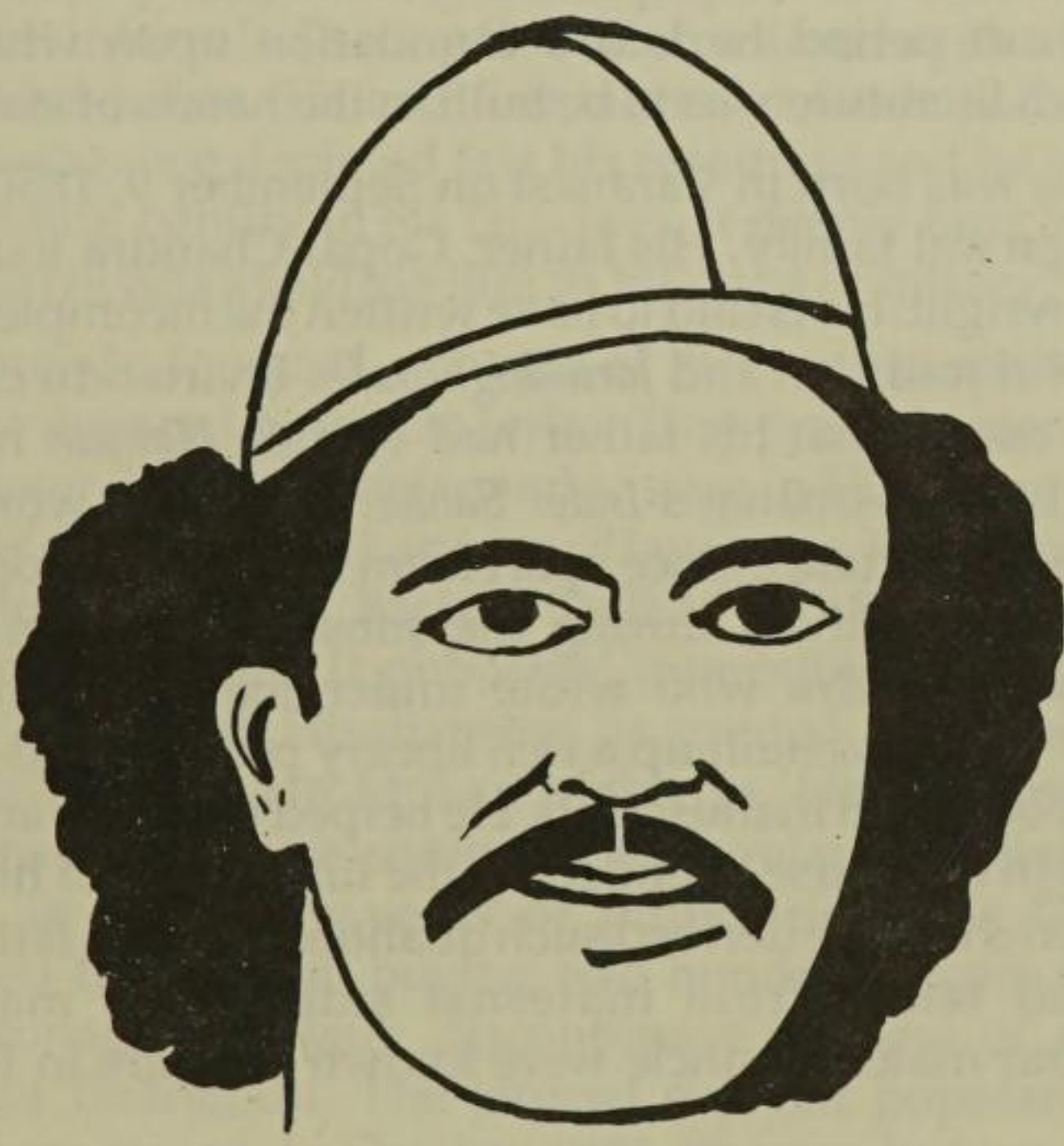
> Having once accepted me with love
> Why do you now thus break away
> Giving once shelter to anchorless
> Why do you leave her in midstream.

Like Surdas, Ghananand directed his composition to spiritual illumination through devotion and love. On occasion he also commented on contemporary life as when he deplored the inefficacy of Mughal ruler (Mohammad Shah) to repulse the invasion of Nadir Shah. "Delhi is now like a cat/scared at the wolfish dog/ Mohammad Shah who blundered before, can do nothing/This is what come to the/Dynasty of Babur and Humayun/The people who mourn/Can only curse themselves".

Ghananand pulled poetry out of the stultified conventions and artificiality. His verses pulsate in emotional content rather than in display of external embellishments. As against the Riti poetry which sought to charm the audience through rhetorical devices, Ghananand portrayed the variegated mental states of his protagonist. His poetry eventually appeals the serious-minded people, capable to introspect and meditate. It is no longer the jugglery of words or play of styles but spontaneous expression of the effusive emotion. He himself once remarked about the spontaneity of his writing: "There are people who make poetry/But I am one whom poetry makes." It is on the count of such characteristic in his poetry that critics like Ram Chandra Shukla found Ghananand free of Riti tradition even as he belonged to that age.

With a liberalised outlook as Ghananand were, he used language in a distinctive style. It was simple Brij Bhasa broad based with Persian influence. The poet was well versed in Persian literature. Persian then was the language of the elite and it was his this knowledge which had elevated him to the position of special secretary in Mughal court. The poet was therefore unconventional in his choice of poetic diction as is specially perceptible in *Ishklata*. He had good command over his language and Brij Bhasa became sweet and sonorous in his hands. It is no exaggeration when the later Hindi poets described him as 'Brij Bhasa Praveen'. And the Hindi literary history recalls him not merely for the sonority of his verses with depth of psychological insight but also for the new direction he gave to Riti poetry and his characteristic spontaneity he lent to it.

Bhartendu Harish Chandra



(1850–1885)

Poet, playwright and essayist, Bhartendu Harish Chandra was the product of Indian Renaissance and represented his age as vigorously as he differed from his predecessors in many respects. Even as he wrote hymns in earlier tradition, he brought into Hindi poetry Arnoldian criticism of life and political awakening. He was a trend-setter of Hindi essay, Hindi journalism and plays. He brought into limelight scores of forgotten works and created a literary circle, the Bhartendu Mandal whose members were to distinguish themselves later in different fields of literature. It is for his massive contribution that Hindi literature of the period 1850-1885 is known as the Bhartendu Age.

Bhartendu Harish Chandra is best known in Hindi literature as Bhartendu (Moon of India), the honour conferred upon him by the litterateurs of his time. He was a poet and author of amazing versatility. The corpus of his vast output, 18 dramas, 30,000 devotional and love songs in addition to his pioneering works of essays, research papers and Hindi journalism, he produced in a short span of almost fifteen years. He died even before he could complete thirtyfive which marked an irreparable loss to Hindi literature. Yet within this short period he laid a foundation upon which the edifice of Hindi literature was to be built in the hands of stalwarts.

Bhartendu was born in Varanasi on September 9, 1850 into a prominent Agarwal family. His father, Gopal Chandra too was a poet and playwright. He is said to have written the incomplete *Rasa Rantnakar* in Riti tradition and *Jarasangh Badh*. Bhartendu claimed in one of his essays that his father had written *Nahush* in 1841, twelve years before Amanat's *Inder Sabha*. The latter work is of great historical importance since apart from being most popular it hastened dramatic activity during the subsequent years of the century. Gopal Chandra who wrote under the pseudonym of "Girdhar Das" had also built up a rich library procuring as he did scores of rare books and manuscripts. He helped the poets and help literary meets in his house attended by the luminaries of his time. Bhartendu seems to have derived such qualities from his father. He also inherited talent from maternal side as his maternal grandfather and maternal uncle were known scholars in Persian literature.

Bhartendu lost his mother at the age of five and when he was ten, his father too passed away. Orphaned of his parents he lost interest in academic pursuits. His education was however arranged at home under Hindi and Urdu tutors. Even when he was admitted to Queens College for regular education at the age of twelve, he did not show much promise in school curriculum and was withdrawn after two years. He married at the age of fourteen.

A voracious reader, Bhartendu studied Hindi, Sanskrit and English literatures at home. He also acquired good knowledge of Urdu, Bengali and Marathi. During his pilgrimage to Jagganath Puri, with his family, he bought a copy of *Vidhava Vivah* (Widow Marriage), a play in Bengali and attempted to read it. He was restless till he learned the language. He was then eleven. His knowledge in Bengali was further enriched when he came in

contact with Molika, a Bengali widow who was a gifted poetess and wrote under the pseudonym of "Chandrika". Bhartendu also picked up Gujarati and Punjabi and tried his hand to compose verses in these languages. As a poet he gave evidence of his genius at an early age of five when composing a couplet on a given situation he surprised his father.

Bhartendu loved the company of poets and authors and entertained them lavishly during the literary meets he held in his house at frequent intervals. During festive occasions hundreds of authors dined in his house. He had fine tastes for foods and dresses. But this extravagance depleted fast his resources and he was reduced to distressing penury in his last days. It deeply hurt him when he found his friends avoiding him in his days of misery.

Bhartendu founded a couple of literary groups whose members were inspired by him to write. They proved veterans in Hindi writing later. He found an anarchic state in Hindi journalism with no proper direction and haphazard language. He launched the first Hindi monthly "Kavi Bachan Sudha" in 1869 which was later turned to fortnightly. It published interesting articles on various subjects in refined Hindi prose as guided by Bhartendu. Lala Shrinivas Das, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Navinchandra Rai and Balkrishna Bhatt were some of the regular contributors to this journal. In the early years of publication, the Government patronised the journal, buying two hundred copies every issue. The patronage was later discontinued in view of nationalistic leaning of Bhartendu. The journal enjoyed popularity till 1885 when it was closed. In October 1873, Bhartendu founded another journal, "Harish Chandra Magazine". The title was later changed to "Harish Chandra Chandrika". It however became irregular after 1880 when Mohanlal Vishnulal Pandiya took over the editorship and it was finally closed. Bhartendu relaunched the journal as "Navodita Harish Chandra Chandrika" in 1884. Only a few copies had been brought out till 1885 when Bhartendu passed away.

With a view to educate the women Bhartendu had also brought out another journal, "Bala Vodhini", a monthly in 1874. Due to financial constraints it could not be continued after 1878. These journals served a vertiable cause for the progress of Hindi prose and provided ample training to the fellow writers who brought out famous Hindi journals in later years. Badri Narayan Premghan, for instance, published from Mirzapur "Anand Kadambini", Bal Krishna Bhatt brought out "Hindi Pradip" from Allahabad and

Pratap Narayan Mishra published "Brahman" from Kanpur. Several other papers like "Arya Mitra" and "Bharat Mitra" were also the results of Bhartendu's inspiration.

For the encouragement of younger generation poets, Bhartendu set up a group in 1870, "Kavita Vardhini" in whose meetings verses by young poets were read and evaluated. Awards were also given to the meritorious works. In 1873 Bhartendu founded the "Penny Reading Club" to prepare and encourage good writers. The articles by the member authors were read in its meetings and the selected pieces were published in the journals edited by Bhartendu. For spiritual awakening and social reformation, Bhartendu founded the "Tadiya Samaj" in 1873. It was this group that called the countrymen to use only the indigenous (Swadesi) goods. This was at a time when the Indian National Congress which took up the Swadesi Movement later, was not even born. The seeds of nationalism were thus sowed by Bhartendu in the northern India much before the freedom struggle. He loved and promoted Hindi language but was not in favour of discarding English. To give shape to such educational system he set up with his limited means a primary school which was called during his life time as the Chaukhamba School. It has grown today as Harish Chandra College in Varanasi.

Bhartendu enjoyed great fame and admiration. In 1870, when just twenty, he was appointed Honorary Magistrate. He served for four years and resigned in 1874. He was municipal commissioner of Varanasi for six years. Scores of scholars and ruler of princely states personally visited him and conferred honour upon Bhartendu. He was also honoured by Lord Lytton and Prince of Wales. In Britain he was known as the greatest Hindi author in India and was approached for Hindi translation of the British national anthem, "God save the Queen". Bhartendu had personal acquaintance with several leading authors and social reformers of the country. Among these included: Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Keshab Chandra Sen, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Navin Chandra Rai etc. He also had foreign admirers like George Grierson, Garson de Tassy, Fredrick Pincott and Annie Besant.

Bhartendu was earlier admirer of British Empire. In 1861 (December 14) when Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria

passed away, he wrote the famous elegy "Albarat Antarlapika", which Laxmisagar Varshney considered as the first work of modern Hindi poetry. He not only wrote commending Duke of Edinborough's visit to India in 1869 but also organised a large meeting of the eminent people of Varanasi. Compositions read in this meeting in praise of the Duke were edited and published by Bhartendu as *Sumanonjali*. Its foreword was written in English by Bhartendu himself. It is dated 10 March 1870. There are numerous other instances of his loyalty to the Empire. The nationalist fervour inspired him after 1873 which became increasingly dominant by 1880 when he satirised and attacked the British systems and all that was English though he spared Queen Victoria whom he admired till end. He took ill in 1882 during his visit to Mewar and never recovered. He died on 6th January 1885 at the age of thirtyfive.

Bhartendu wrote very fast and always kept writing material with him. He wrote *Andher Nagari* as well as *Vijayini Vijay* in one day. He never corrected his copies, nor did he compare the proofs with original text. He had fine handwriting. He published most of his works in his journals "Kavi Vachan Sudha" and "Harish Chandra Chandrika". These were later issued in volumes. He authored twentyone major and fortyeight minor poetic works in addition to scores of verses not included in any books.

Bhartendu's literary career began with the translation of *Vidya Sundar* in 1868 which contains twelve verses. His early works are chiefly devotional in character beginning with *Bhakt Sarvaswa* (1870) to which he of course attached no significance as he later said, "Its poetry is devoid of all poetic merit." It contains 301 dohas (couplets) and seven chchapai (six line verses) in praise of Lord Krishna. In *Prem Malika* (1871), a collection of hundred verses, the poet seeks to approach God with love and humility. In some verses he also sings Lord's grace in earthly sport (Leela). *Vaisakh Mahatmya* (1872) in 93 couplets is of ecclesiastical nature. The poems of *Phoolon Ka Guchcha* (1872) in Urdu is in the fashion of contemporary trend. The composition is however not very satisfactory and is marked with technical defects. The poet's liberal attitude to religion is reflected in his subsequent work *Jain Kutuhal* (1873) containing thirtysix verses.

Bhartendu's works on love theme won him instantaneous applause. There is mild satire in the Sringar of separation, though not exactly in Riti tradition. The woman burns in flame of love

when separated from her lover. The wind blowing from windows will fuel the flame further :

Shut the windows and draw curtains
Let no air enter inflammable that it is
Seek not to touch her even in dream
Burning as she is, she may singe you too.

—*Prem Pralap*

The works on love theme include *Prem Sarovar* (1873), *Prema-shru* (1873), *Prem Phulvari* (1873), *Prem Tarang* (1877) and *Prem Pralap* (1877). Love depicted in the verses is both towards God and earthly beings. *Prem Tarang* containing 148 verses is highly lyrical and well set to music. Some of the verses are based on folk music. In the intervening period in 1877, Bhartendu published *Bhaktmal Uttarardh*. Prior to Bhartendu, a work *Bhaktmal* (Praise of Devotees) had appeared by a poet, Nabha. Bhartendu therefore entitled his work as Uttarardh (Subsequent). *Geet Govindanand* (1877) is Hindi translation of Sanskrit *Geet Govind* by Jaidev, with a couple of introductory verses in praise of Jaidev. These works might apparently suggest mere amorous and theological compositions. But within the traditional framework the poet offered a critical observation of his time. He abhorred all ostentatious practices in religion and did not hesitate to condemn them even if it offended the mighty puritans. About wandering hermits and hypocrisy in *Yagya* (sacrifice) he said :

Swinging hands, making noises
They throw the god in sacrificial pit
And look to show love they wander
With no place to rest !

—*Jain Kutuhal*

Just so the theme of Holi festival is given an extended treatment in *Holi* (1879) and *Madhumukul* (1881). In the latter work the poet draws attention to the political exploitation and depravity of the people :

They lost all wealth and never learnt to be wise
And yet as beggars they rejoice the Holi
Dependent, timid, cruel and lazy with nothing to eat
They grope in darkness even in Spring. O the Holi!

He mounts a similar attack in the poem, "Bharat Me Holi Machi Hai". The poems of "Varsha Vinod" (1880) are significant for their lyrical ecstasies based on ragas such as *malar* and *kajali*. The much

discussed *Prem Madhuri* (1880) wallows in sonorous love songs with a discerning throwback to the Riti tradition. As the lovers' meet in bushes, "They embrace and shower kisses again and again/Like drunken souls they blurt confused words." *Vinay Prem Pachasa* (1881) and *Krishna Charit* (1883) are based on the legend of Krishna-Gopi relations. The poet shares sympathy with the gopis depicting them outwitting all arguments in favour of Krishna's desertion. The didactic work *Kartik Snan* (1884) deals with rituals the poet prescribes for the purification of soul. In *Raag Sangrah* (1884), though the poet picks up the Rama theme, it deals throughout with the Krishna episode. Containing 141 verses, it became popular with the masses as the poems are highly musical and were sung in the temples and festivals.

In the Riti period that preceded Bhartendu, we have no tradition of narrative poetry. Bhartendu's father, Gopal Chandra had tried his hand in this field. His *Jarasangh Badh* is of epic framework without of course being an epic per se. A significant contribution in this category of poetical works was made by Bhartendu. His works of this kind include *Devi Chchadma Leela* (1873), *Tanmai Leela* (1874), *Daan Leela* (1874), *Rani Chchadma* (1874) and *Venu Giti* (1875).

Bhartendu revolted against the ruling vogue of Style, both in form and content which still held the sway as set in by the Riti poets. He resurrected Hindi poetry from erotic and religious confines and introduced multiple new thoughts in the poetic theme as also the felicity and simplicity of poetic expression discarded by the earlier tradition. He was responsive to all that was happening in the country in literature, society and politics and made his works responsive to them. He also revolted against the traditional norms of prosody and introduced different forms and metres which are yet subject of scholastic studies. Even as irregular, his poems are of deep musical effect like those of folk songs. These are set to classical ragas with variation about which he was well convinced. He enunciated his poetic principles in the meetings of Kavita Vardhini and Penny Reading Club. Beginning with the influence of Riti poetry, he was influenced by Surdas and the sonority of Brij Bhasa. He wrote poetry in Brij Bhasa and believed it to be the effective medium of Hindi poetry though he advocated and set ideals of Khariboli in prose writing. He enriched the language by assimilating words of common speech. There were two groups during his time, one favouring pro-Persian and the other pro-Sanskrit. Bhar-

tendu chose the middle path which proved healthier for Hindi literature in the years that followed.

Bhartendu admired mother-tongue and Hindi being his language he loved it far too deeply. When Persian was replaced with Urdu as the court language which was neither the language of the majority nor of the rulers, Bhartendu satirised it: "Now the language of world is Urdu / Sink Hindi books in water" (Bhasa bhai Urdu jag ki ab, in granthan ko neer dubaiye). It is his famous speech in verse (98 couplets) on the significance of Hindi delivered at Allahabad in 1877 that is remembered in the annals of Hindi literature as the founding father of Hindi :

> It is through one's own language that he may prosper
> It is the key to all prosperity
> It is through his own language
> That one may shed his grief
> (Nij bhasa unnati ahay, sab unnati ko mool)
> Bin nij bhasa ke mitan na hiye ko shool)

Bhartendu however acknowledged the richness of English language which he believed was due to extensive translations. He exhorted the Hindi litterateurs to undertake Hindi translations of the classics like the Englishmen. "There are numerous different arts, education and knowledge/Get them from all nations to spread in your language" (Vividh kala, siksha amit, gyan anek prakar/Sab desan se lai karu bhasa mahi prachar).

Bhartendu's poetic genius and ingenuity are also found in his plays where there are stimulating verses that pulsate with insight and critical perceptions. The original plays written by Bhartendu are of social and political themes. He is the first playwright in modern Hindi just as he is the first essayist in the language. It is through these plays that he gave call for socio-political awakening and drew attention of the people to the high morals of Indian society. These plays are : *Prem Jogini* (1875), *Chandrawati* (1876), *Bharat Janani* (1877), *Bharat Durdasha* (1880), *Neel Devi* (1881), *Sati Pratap* (1883), *Satya Harish Chandra* (1875), *Vedic Himsa Himsa na Bhavati* (1873), *Vishshya Visham-aushadham* (1876), and *Andher Nagari* (1881). He translated *Vidya Sundar* from Bengali and *Karpoor Manjari* from Prakrit. From Sanskrit he translated *Mudra Rakshasa, Dhananjay Vijay, Pakhand Viddamban* and *Geet Govind*. He also translated Shakespeare's comedy, *Merchant of Venice*. In addition, he wrote the famous *Bandar Sabha* which is a parody of *Inder Sabha*, the first play in Urdu.

While *Satya Harish Chandra* drawn from mythology is on the lofty theme of the triumph of truth, *Andher Nagari* is a biting satire that also alludes to the contemporary absurdities. *Bharat Durdasha* contains nationalisitc theme which years later flowered in *Bharat Bharti* in the hands of Maithili Sharan Gupta. Bhartendu deplores the wretched condition of the people and their inactivity. "Come brothers, let us mourn together/Country's plight is unbearable!" (Roahu sab milike abahu Bharat bhai/Ha, ha! Bharat durdasha na dekhi jayee). The agony is expressed in first person when the country cries to its people:

> None comes to my help
> With twenty crore children I remain orphan
> I am spurned all over, none listens to my woes...

Bhartendu even directly attacks the British rule. "The kingdom of Englishmen is big burden/Wealth goes abroad, what is left is misery". He also attacked the Indian sensibility that worshipped the white man as 'God' :

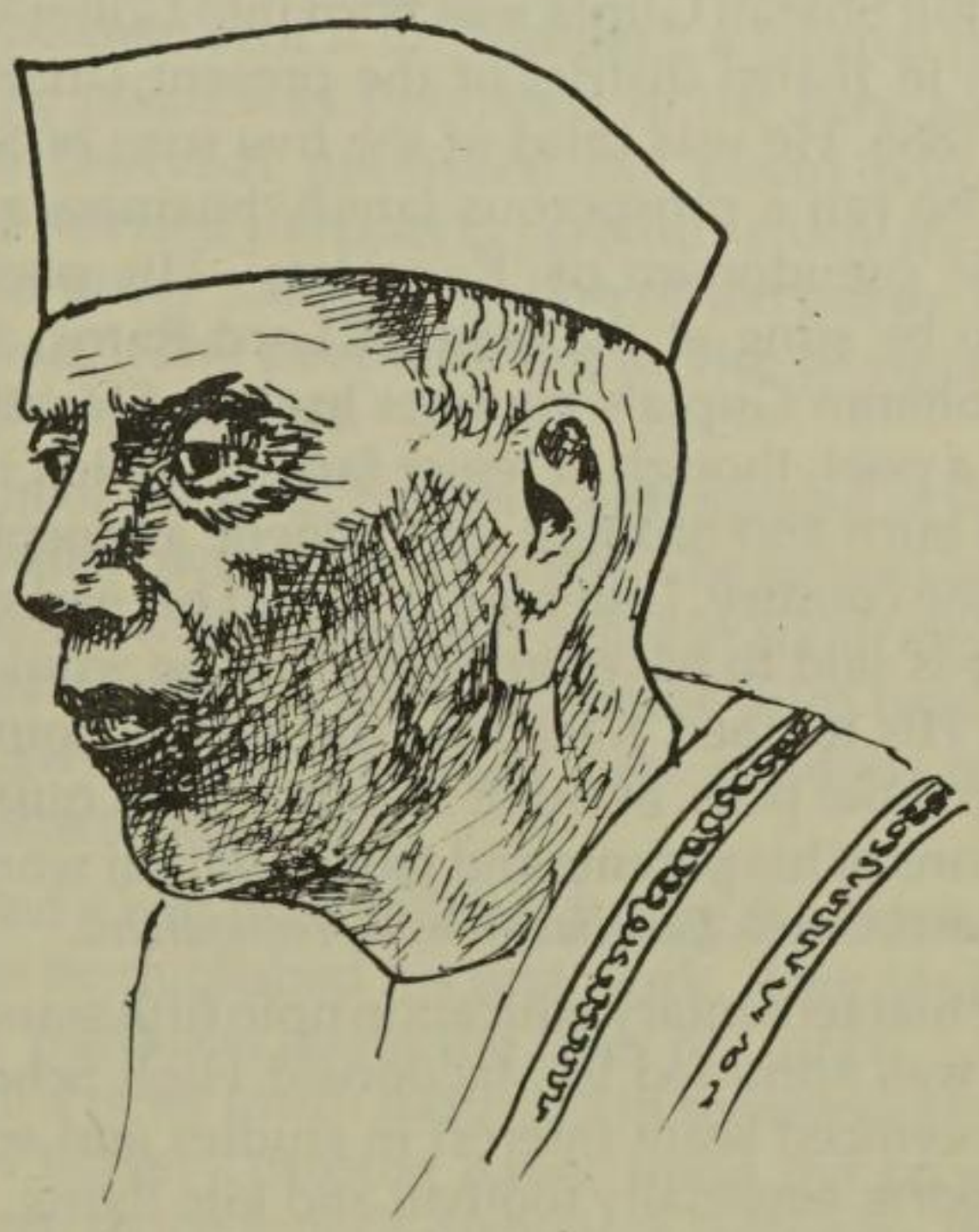
> Trader, sailor or scavenger
> A great priest or seer!
> They worship the white man as a king
> Just watch their humble faces!!
> (Saudagar, melua, jahaji/Gora dharampati jag kazi/
> Sabahi raaj sam poojan karahi/Sabke mukh dekhat hi dharahi)

He raised his voice against casteism much before Gandhiji. "Dividing into several castes/we have divided ourselves into high and low" (...Ja anekan kari, neench aru oonch banayo). And he gave call to unity much before the Indians witnessed the dangerous consequences of divisionism: "and the duplicity for self-interest:" "Have brothers now one aim/Forsake wicked games of duplicity" (Ho ek mat bhai sabahi ab/Chchodahu chal kuchal ho durangi). The verses in his plays are as such extension of the thoughts expressed in his poems. The excerpt just quoted last is from his "Varsha Vinod". The study of his poetry is therefore enriched with the perusal of his plays.

Whatever Bhartendu wrote is of great historical significance. His eminence as poet compels our recognition not only for his poetical output but also his prose works strewn with verses at once delightful and enlightening. His variety is immense. As a

nationalist poet he appreciated the invaluable role of folk languages in which he wished songs should be written to emotionally inspire the people down at village level. He wrote in "Kavi Vachan Sudha" in 1879 : "All of us known that it is through common people that the message is spread throughout the country. This is also known that village songs spread very fast. The effect of literature through music is more stimulant than ordinary education... For this purpose shorter songs must be written in simple language and metres rather in folk languages and the speech known to the women."

Maithili Sharan Gupta



(1886–1964)

Coming to twentieth century Hindi poetry, one arrives at a fairly broader ground both in terms of language and themes. Coursing from chivalric, devotional and amorous poetry of the past centuries, Hindi poetry was reached a freer pasture of nationalistic and social themes. Religion was reinterpreted on these themes and humanism and didacticism became the reigning feature of this poetry. The poets delved into the ancient scriptures particularly the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and wrote extensively on the characters and events less elaborated in these epics. The poets also looked to the chronicles for their themes. Thus historical works provided the major gist for this poetry.

Yet another major event of this period was acceptance of Khariboli for poetic composition. For certain reasons, it had come to be believed earlier that Khariboli though chould be the vehicle for prose, it was quite unsuitable for poetry. Maithili Sharan Gupta was first among the major poets who realised far too timely that the future of Hindi poetry lay in Khariboli and not Brij Bhasa inspite of the sweetness of the latter.

Maithili Sharan Gupta was born into Gohoi Vaishya family at Chirgaon in Jhansi district of the present Uttar Pradesh on 3rd August, 1886. He was third of the five sons of Seth Ram Charan Gupta who ran a prosperous family business and wrote poetry under the pseudonym of 'Kanaklata'. His poems were mostly hymns to be sung at the latar of Lord Rama, the family deity. Maithili Sharan Gupta's younger brother Shiaram Sharan Gupta was also a poet, though of lesser fame. He died in 1963. Our poet was thus born and brought up in poetic atmosphere unlike most poets in the country. Listening to one of his earliest compositions, his father is said to have predicted that he would be a great poet one day. His mother, Kashibai who was devoutly religious also encouraged the poet. Maithili Sharan Gupta quite lived up to the expectations of his parents and gave to Hindi world such works as *Bharat Bharti, Saket, Panchavati* and *Yashodhara.*

After his elementary education upto fifth standard at Chirgaon the poet was admitted to Macdonald High School at Jhansi. He however evinced scant interest in studies and spent much of his time in sports, especially football and kite flying. A fruitful diversion during this period was perhaps his interest in drama and Ramlila. He even toyed with an idea of joining a Ramlila company. These developments and little interest of the poet in studies quite upset his father who believed poetry and literature could be only pastime occupation. He had wished him to qualify for civil services and be a deputy collector, the coveted post those day. Now that he feared the child may be trapped by the roving Ramlila company, he called him back home and arranged for his education, under the guidance of his accountant, Munshi Ajmeri. Surprisingly under the care of Munshi Ajmeri, the poet developed taste for learning. He learnt Sanskrit and the classics under various teachers and showed particular interest in the works of the Sanskrit poet, Bhas. He also composed poems and read them out before the family elders. Even before he was 15, his poems had appeared in the journal, "Vaishyopkark" which was then being brought out from Calcutta.

Munshi Ajmeri played the most eventful part in the poet's life when he introduced him to the doyen of Hindi literature, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi who then edited the famous Hindi journal, "Saraswati", published from Jhansi where he worked in the Railways. The journal had been started in 1901. Following his acquaintance, the poet sent to Dwivedi, one of his early poems "Hemanta" for publication. The poem did not appear for quite some time which upset the poet who then sent it to "Mohini", a journal published from Kannauj. The poem was published in the very next issue. After some time Dwivedi published the poem with certain modifications and advised the poet to carefully study the changes and that he should never seek publication of the poems not published in "Saraswati". The poet took the advice in right earnest which helped build up his craft.

In the tradition of the time, the poet was married at the age of nine in 1895. His wife however died in 1904. The following year he remarried. His second wife also passed away in about eight years. On pressures of his relations he married for the third time in 1914. From this wife, Saryu Devi, he begot nine children of whom however Urmila Sharan survived.

The poet earned a bit of recognition during the life time of his second wife, when he published his first work, *Rang Me Bhang* in 1908. It is a poetic narration about the ruler of Gonoli, Lal Singh who incensed with a petty insult indulged in senseless bloodshed in a false show of bravery causing havoc upon the people. The work drew attention to the foolish display of valour by the brave men of the country who should have instead taken braver steps in the greater cause of the nation. Written chiefly in Khariboli, it found favour from such authorities as Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi even if it bears evidence of a hang-over of Brij Bhasa. The poet's direction to Khariboli was however clear after the publication of this work. He wrote all his subsequent works in Khariboli Hindi.

The poet's second work, *Jaidrath Badh* published in 1910 also proved an equal success. Based on an episode from *Mahabharta*, it is written in seven Sargas (cantos). After the killing of Abhimanyu, his father, Arjuna vows to kill Jaidratha, the king of Sindh. He carries through his vow in spite of a formidable defense put up by the enemy forces. Within the narrative of this episode, the poet renders the difficult philosophical tenets of *Geeta*. *Jaidrath Badh* was followed by a less ambitious work, *Padya Prabandh* published in 1912.

By now the poet had been drawn to the nationalistic influence under the inspiration of Bhartendu in literature and numerous leaders in Swaraj movement. This influence was the *tour de force* of his fourth book, *Bhat Bharti* published in 1914. Before its appearance in book form that year, its excerpts had been published in "Saraswati". The Khariboli used in these excerpts so impressed the editor that he did not publish any poem in Brij Bhasa in the journal that year. Steeped in nationalism, the work exhorts the readers to rise to the glory of ancient times:

> What we were!
> What are we today!
> And what awaits us tomorrow!
> Come, let us devote to such issues.

But then there are exhortations to almost every section of Indian Society or rather the Hindu society. He makes plea to the Kshatriyas and Brahmins equally: "O the Brahmins, be wise like your ancestors/Do not be lost in self-glory/Think of religion/O the Kshatriyas rise again to erase/The stains of your forefathers in recent history/Prepare your life for the motherland." The poet wishes his country to be as glorious as it were during ancient Aryan time which is only possible by discarding the petty feelings of differences and building up trust and mutual harmony: "May this land of Aryans awake/and be the land of great events/May that love and trust shower/To shed all differences." The poet even exhorts his fellow practitioners to guide the community: "The poet shouldn't just aim to entertain/He must also offer to guide." This affirms the poet's credo in didacticism in poetic avocation. Though the work did not augur any revolutionary movement in the country, it did succeed in shaking many people from slumber and the readers hailed the deep love of the poet for his motherland. The poet said: "The Bharatvarsha!/God, build it again a holy land!" *Bharat Bharti* was an instant success and was widely welcomed by Hindi world. After the country attained independence, it was on the eminence earned by the poet by this work that he was appointed the poet laureate of the country. The famous essay, "Hundred Best Works in Hindi" that appeared in the fifties described *Bharat Bharti* as the best work of the poet and even greater than the subsequent work, *Saket* which is today generally considered as greater than the former. The works that followed *Bharat Bharti*, were, *Shakuntala* (1916), *Tilottama* (1916), *Chandra Haas* (1916), *Kisan* (1917), *Vaitalik* (1919) and *Patrawali* (1923). Of these,

Kisan made quite an impact on contemporary ethos. It depicts a farmer who enlists as a coolie and sails to South Africa. Fighting for his British masters, he succumbs to the enemy bullets on the bank of Tigris river. The work makes the emphatic suggestion of the sacredness to sacrifice life for the sake of motherland rather than a foreign land for the sake of earning livelihood.

In 1925, the poet again made a ripple with the publication of *Panchawati*. Built upon the theme drawn form *Ramayana*, it portrays the noble character of Urmila as also Laxman, her husband who is the hero of the poem. Yet, Urmila fails to rise above her petty domestic pedestal. She is more concerned at her separation from her husband than the agonies and sufferances of others. Even on the nationalistic issues, so characteristic of the poet's general theme, she has no notions whatsoever. But then the poem offers us a fine commentary of male domination in Indian society. And this we learn more from others and not from Urmila. The cannibal woman Surpanakha comments: "The man writing scriptures made restrictions/only for woman/As for themselves, they made/ all provisions of joys and comforts."

In the following years, Gupta wrote some of the finest lyrics: Religion and nationalism again permeate these works. *Swadesh Sangeet* (1925) evokes nationalistic sentiments while *Anagh* (1925) draws its theme from Buddhism. The *Hindu* (1926) makes an attempt to resuscitate the lost glory of Hinduism. *Tripathga* (1928) which includes "Vak-Sanghar", "Van Vaibhav" and "Sairandhri", draws themes from *Mahabharta* for their narratives. *Shakti* (1928) contains mythological narrative. The poet's credo in Sikhism is noticeable in *Gurukul* (1928). The *Vikat Bhat* (1928) is based on folk-lore. The lyrics of *Jhankar* (1929) portray the poet's capacity to assimilate the contemporary poetic trends of romanticism. The poet's practice of his craft and reading of the scriptures found fruition in the writing of *Saket* (1932) which is considered as his *magnum opus*.

In writing of *Saket* which began in 1911 after the publication of *Jaidrath Badh*, the poet took fairly a long time. Pre-eminently propagating Hindu culture, it was once said to be a great work after Tulsidas's *Ram Charit Manas*. But as an epic, it contains only a fragment of the *Ram Charit Manas*, highlighting the aspects of Laxman and his wife Urmila not dealt at length by Tulsidas in his work. Like *Panchavati*, the hero of the epic is Laxman and a due prominence is sought to be given to Urmila. However in treatment

of the theme, there is an apparent disproportion. Laxman is portrayed as an ideal brother and a model of self-less social service which is further heightened in the delineation of the character of Lord Rama. Yet he seems to be ever in hurry and lacks the gravity of an epic hero. Thus despite his sacrifice, courage and bravery, he fails to rise to the stature of an epic hero. Urmila (like Yashodhara) only bemoans her separation from her husband. She is incapable to reflect over the woes of the world far less to mitigate them. At a time when millions of people were fighting for the country's independence, the characters of the epic caught up in the web of their domestic issues never for a while reflect over the bigger problems. We therefore find no grand design in the epic. The poet seems to justify this failure through the version of Lord Rama: "Each man has right to protect himself/The state alone has/ the burden to ensure comfort to all." Yet the poet achieves what perhaps he did not intend to do. It is in the characterisation of Lord Rama. A symbol of righteous religion, Rama represents an ideal in social, personal, religious and political lives. He shows a humanistic concern when he states that he did not come from heaven to earth. Instead, "I came to make the man divine" and make earth the heaven. The nationalistic dimension therefore gives way to the exposition of Hindu ideal and Aryan culture. And poetically it has been described as a Virah Kavya—song of separation.

Yashodhara (1932-33) is almost a counterpart of *Saket* though less ambitious. It deals with the separation of Yashodhara from her husband Gautama who abandons the worldly life in search of truth and becomes finally the Buddha. The concerns and woes of Yashodhara are similar to that of Urmila in *Saket,* though on a higher plane. The issue on the salvation of mankind however strikes attention quite as the suggestion for social service. The poet treats varied themes in *Mangal Ghat* (1934). In *Dwapar* (1936) he portrays the character of Lord Krishna. There are some fine monologues in this work and an attempt in recapturing the social ethos of the time. By now the poet's place in national literature was undisputed. In 1936 he published his next work *Siddhraj.*

The subsequent works were *Nahush* (1940), *Kunal Geet* (1942), *Arjan Aur Visarjan* (1942), *Vishwa Vedna* (1942), *Kaba Aur Karbala* (1942), *Anjali Aur Ardhya* (1946), *Ajit* (1947) and *Pradikshina* (1950). *Kunal Geet* is lyrical and depicts the poet's scholarship of Buddhist theology. Most of the songs written addressed to Kunal's wife, Kanchan Mala are very poignant. Historically, Kunal had been

blinded for his ideals and chastity. There is therefore an introspective description in the work. Kunal seeks love of mankind and light of Buddha: "Chalta hun andha hokar tathagath ke path par" (Blinded I walk on the path shown by Buddha.")

In the meanwhile, for his nationalistic writings, the poet had been imprisoned by the British rulers in 1941. Earlier he had been honoured by the Hindustani Akademi with an award of Rs. 500 in 1935. The Tulsi Mimansha Parishad honoured him in 1936 with the presentation of "Maithili Kavya Man Grantha" by Mahatma Gandhi. The Sahitya Sammelan honoured him with Mangla Prasad award of Rs. 1200 in 1937. In 1946, the Kashi Nagri Prachrini Sabha awarded him Rs.10000. In 1948, the Agra University conferred upon him the honorary degree of D.Lit. Thus honours and awards showered upon the poet almost in a gale. This however did not affect his poetic output. He published successively, *Prithivi Putra* (1951), *Hidimba* (1951), *Jai Bharat* (1952), *Raja Praja* (1952), *Guru Tegbahadur* (1952), *Yuddh* (1953), *Bhoomi Bhag* (1954) and the antho-logy *Kavi Shri* in 1956.

In independent India, the poet was nominated as the Member of Rajya Sabha in 1952 and was renominated for a subsequent period of six years. The nation honoured him with *Padma Bhushan* in 1954. He published *Vishnu Priya* in 1958 and the last three works *Uchchvas, Leela* and *Ratnawali* in 1961.

Apart from his original writings, the poet published translations of certain famous works which included *Meghnath Badh* of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, *Brtra Sanghar, Plassi Ka Yuddh, Virangana, Swapna Vasavdatta* and *Virahini Brajangana*. His translation of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyyat* is however nowhere near Bachchan's translation. His other works of translations are *Pratima, Avimarak,* and *Abhishek*. He also co-authored a prose translation, *Grahastha Geeta*.

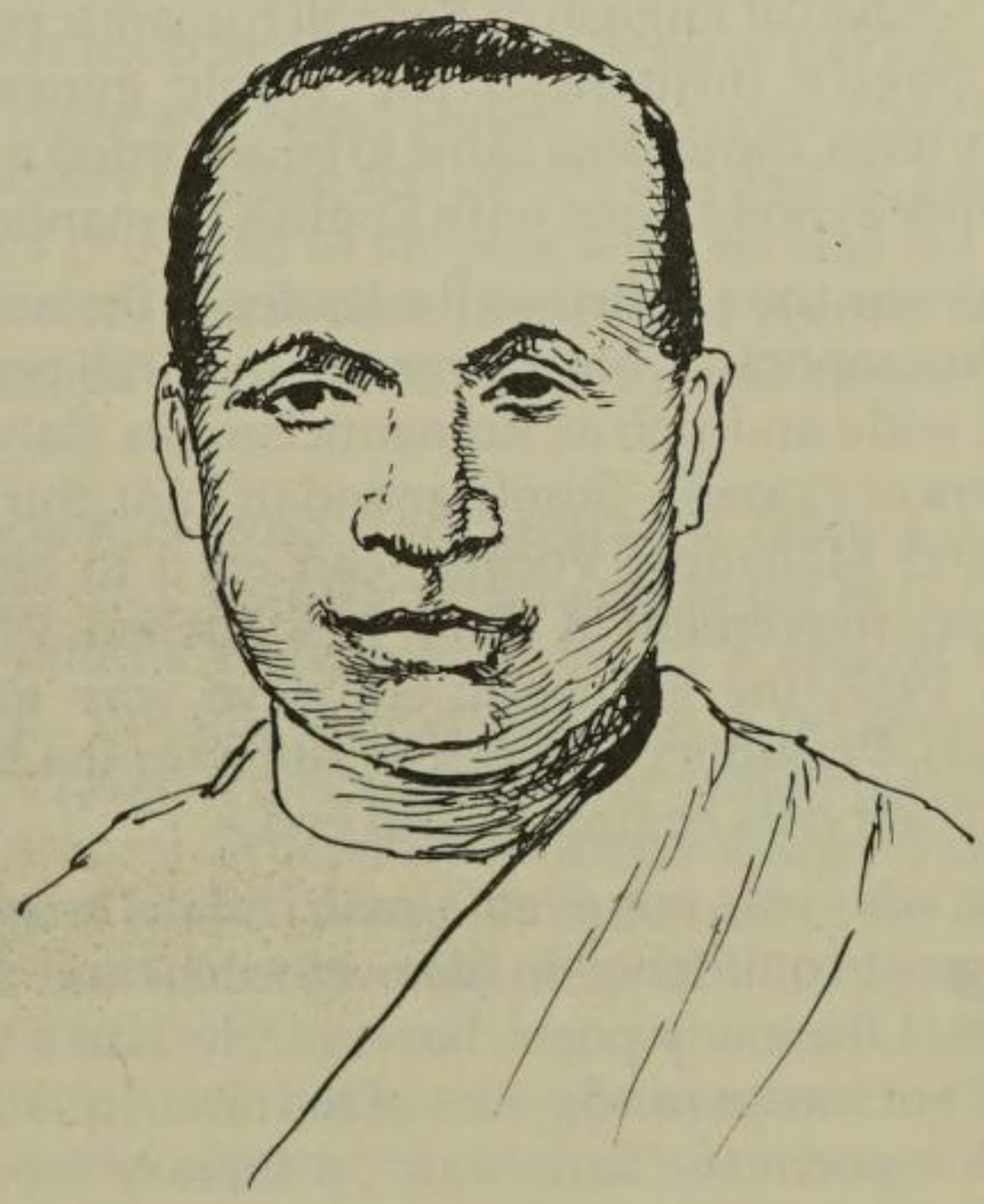
Maithili Sharan Gupta thus authored as many as fortyfour books of poems and ten translations during nearly half a century of his creative writing. He died in 1964, at the age of seventy eight. An author of neglected characters in the classics and the mythologies, he is remembered as an inveterate upholder of Hindu values and Aryan culture from which his view of nationalism was never separated. He had quite a successful poetic career as is evident from the face that by 1941 *Jaidrath Badh* and *Bharat Bharti* had run into 13 editions. The poet had set up his own press in

Chirgaon in 1920. Known as the Sahitya Press, it was managed by his elder brother, Ram Kishan Gupta.

As a Member of Rajya Sabha, the poet lived in Delhi at 35, Meena Bagh near Vigyan Bhavan. He was a staunch Gandhian and wore khadi—his usual dress being dhoti, kurta and white cap. He spent his spare time in spinning yarns. Besides Hindi, he knew Bengali and Sanskrit. He knew no English. He wrote his poems on slate and copied them down on paper after corrections.

Paving the way for Khari Boli for Hindi poetry, Maithili Sharan Gupta secured for himself a permanent place in Hindi literature. He was foremost in the Dwivedi Age and also an *avant-garde* poet in what is called the *Itibratatmak* (narrative) style of Hindi poetry. Quite consistent in his poetic creed, he was not affected by the successive movements in Hindi poetry; the romanticism, progressivism, experimentalism and the New Poetry.

Jaya Shankar Prasad



(1889–1937)

Romantic poetry in Hindi began in a way in 1912, the year Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Jaya Shankar Prasad who was to become pioneer of Hindi Romantic poetry, published that year two collections of versed, *Kanan Kusum* (Wood Flower) and *Prem Pathik* (Pilgrim of Love). These two works created a sensation in the world of Hindi poetry rather like the reaction which the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) of Wordsworth and Coleridge had evoked over a century ago in English poetry.

Prasad's poems were remarkable for their portrayal of emotional ecstasy and subjectivism and the use of the contemporary idiom. Using Khariboli instead of the established literary language,

Brij Bhasa, he attempted to rescue Hindi poetry from the orthodox narrative (itivratatmak) style. He chose nature for his poetic subject and explored its dignified personifications, its manifestation of the divine force and its kinship as a lover. These sentiments characterised Hindi poetry for two decades, from 1918 to 1936, the Romantic period in Hindi literature.

Hostile critics branded the poetry of Prasad and his followers as *chchayavadi* composition by which they meant it was a mere shadow (*chchaya*) of English or Bengali romantic poetry. However, the new poetry influenced the whole generation and the derogatory term, *chchayavad* came to be accorded a recognition and respectability synonymous with English Romanticism.

Prasad was soon hailed as the leader of the new movement or the era of Romanticism. No movement in Hindi poetry has been so sustained, wide and rich as Romanticism. Its stalwarts who were all followers of Prasad—Sumitranandan Pant, Suryakant Tripathi "Nirala" and Mahadevi Verma—carried it to heights which no other literary movement in Hindi has touched. With the death of Prasad in 1937, the Romantic era gave way to Progressivism (Pragativad). Prasad's poeic career sums up the history of Hindi Romantic poetry; its beginning and end.

Prasad who was not even a matriculate, seems like Keats to have had great confidence in his own talent and his contribution to literature. Like many poets, however, he had a very rough deal at the hands of fortune and critics of his time. In 1906, when he was 17, he sent a poem to "Saraswati", a literary monthly edited by Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi. The editor not only found the poem unpublishable but also mocked at the poem's new traits. He ridiculed its diction, style and treatment and said that it was not a poem. To the young poet it was more than a disappointment who resolved never to make any contribution to "Saraswati" and stood by the vow all his life. This was by no means a small pledge since those days every writer in Hindi aspired to be published in "Saraswati", especially the budding ones.

Prasad, born in Varanasi in January 1889, had to pass through the mill at a very early age. His father died when he was nine and three years after, his mother passed away. His elder brother who then undertook to run the family, also died when the poet was 17. The yoke of family encumbrance now fell on Prasad on whose earning nearly half a dozen souls had to subsist. One instinctively

recalls Wordsworth, Prasad's Romantic counterpart in English who was orphaned at 12.

For his livelihood, Prasad had no option but to run the family shop in Narial Bazar, Varanasi. For the poet it was his study chamber, place of meditation and writing. He would scribble his poems on the vacant pages of his accounts books. It is said some of the best poems of the poet were written in the shop; almost half of *Kamayani* was composed here. In course of time, it turned out a blessed resort to the poet for persons of varied tastes, talent and learning visited his shop and among them were Rai Krishna Das, Maithili Sharan Gupta and Nand Dulare Bajpayee. They held here long sessions of poetry reading and poetry discussion, generally in the evenings. They provided to the poet what he was not destined to learn at University. It was here that Prasad recited his poems which is of historical importance since Prasad rarely attended poetry meets.

Prasad's ancestors who had migrated from Gazipur to Varanasi, had been once wealthy merchants of the holy town. His grandfather, Shivaratna Sahu manufacured a special brand of perfumed tobacco, 'Sunghani' and fabulously prospered in the trade. Till today Prasad's descendants are remembered as Sunghani Sahus of Varanasi. Prosperity however declined during his father's (Devi Prasad) time. When his father died, he left heavy debts to be settled which only multiplied in litigations over the family feud that flared on the ownership of the shop. All through his life, Prasad had to accordingly struggle to square up the debts and maintain the family, dreaming of a time when he would be free of stresses and be able to concentrate on writing with a tranquil mind. Added to his economic hardship was his personal tragedy. His first wife whom he had married at the age of 20, died within ten years of his marriage. He married again who too did not live long. Prasad married for a third time of whom (Kamla Devi) was born Ratna Shankar who lives in Varanasi. Finally, when the favourable opportunity came for creative works, death intercepted the poet's ambition. He died of tuberculosis at the age of 48 on November 15, 1937. A few months before he had published his epic, *Kamayani* which was acclaimed by Hindi world as the second great work in the language since Tulsidas's *Ram Charit Manas*.

Prasad began to write as early as 1898 when he was merely nine. For a few years he wrote under the pseudonym of 'Kaladhar'. His first composition was a Sawaiya. His poems made their first

public appearance through the pages of "Bhartendu", a hand-scripted (later issued in print) literary journal. Soon his poems began to appear regularly in "Indu", a literary monthly, launched by his nephew Ambika Prasad Gupta in 1911. Prasad wrote most of the editorials in this journal. His essays on poetic theory, later issued in book form as *Kavya Aur Kala*, were also published in this journal.

Prasad published in 1909 his maiden work, *Urvashi*. This was in Brij Bhasa. This was followed the same year by *Prem Rajya* (Rule of Love) and *Ayodhya Ka Uphar* (Deliverance of Ayodhya). In these works he continues to be in the spell of Brij Bhasa as in successive two works *Shokochhwas* (Sighs of Sorrow) and *Babhru Vahan* published in 1910 and 1911. That his forte and the future of Hindi poetry lay in Hindi Khariboli is evident with his first work in Khariboli, *Kanan Kusum*. It is a collection of 49 poems on varied themes of nature, devotion and legends. "Chitra" (Portrait), "Ekant" (The Recluse), "Jalad Avahan" (Clouds Coming), "Grism Ka Madhyan"(Midday in Summer), "Pratham Prabhat"(The First Dawn) and "Nishidh Nadi"(River by Night) are some of the popular poems in this anthology. "Chitra" is the poet's first poem in Hindi Khariboli. These poems drew the attention of Hindi readers to the kinship of nature personified in feminine form with its splendour and mysteries.

In resonant Khariboli, the poet develops his theme without recourse to narrative which was the dominant trait of the time in Hindi poetry. Prasad made a big departure in not only choosing Khariboli for poetic expression but also a new technique, style and an altogether new approach to the poetic subject matter. In his next work, *Prem Pathik* where he seems to display influence of Goldsmith's *Hermit* (translated by Shridhar Pathak), he carried the new style and treatment yet further.

The Romantic Movement in Hindi came to the fore with the publication of Prasad's *Jharna* (The Fountain) in 1918, the year Premchand switched over to Hindi from Urdu. In 55 poems of this collection there is conscious attempt to emancipate the individual—what Victor Hugo called 'liberalism in literature'. In all major poems of this work: "Chinha" (the Sign), "Archana" (Offering), "Vishad" (The Remorse) and "Milan" (The Tryst) there is a release of emotion and an urge for the remote and abstract. The abstract is concretised and nature is depicted as an interpreter of inner self.

The poet's lyrical intensity and a voice of unbounded sorrow find expression in *Aansu* (1924), a blossom of colour and imagery. It is an extended elegy not bewailing the death of any particular person but objectifying the poet's cry over his failures and vacuities. The music and melancholy of the work, with an undertone of serenity and profoundness rolls wave after wave in the surges of lyrical reflections:

> That, which was a concretized pain
> Spread out in the mind as memory
> And ushered on my onimous life...
> As a fall of gushed-out tears
> Let this tear and that smile dissolve and
> Join together
> To bloom agani in form of buds
> Let it rain in vernal drizzle.

Through 190 quatrains the poem progresses without any plot-sequence. Thematically the poem has two phases; in the former melancholy is prominent while in the latter it is succeeded by edification. Here also we find his pantheistic revelation. In the consciousness of beauty the poet discovers God diffused in nature. He grows mystic in his awareness. This mysticism became later, the cardinal trait of another Romantic poet, Mahadevi Verma, a follower of Prasad.

Towards the close of third decade, Prasad sloughed off the earlier pessimism. Steeped in optimistic credence, the poems of *Lahar* (The Wave) are marked with a deep sense of humanism, a sublimity in language and idealism in faith. Published in 1933, *Lahar* contains some thritythree poems. Some of these are autobiographical in nature remind the reader of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. The poem, "What lore of life the bee recounts in its hum!" was written for the special number of "Hansa" on the request of Prasad's friend, Munshi Premchand who was then editing the journal. The poem was published on the cover page of "Hansa". Love for nature and escapist urge from the bustle of urban life finds its mellow yet vigorous manifestation in such popular poem as "Sail me out somewhere steadily, my boatsman!"

Profoundly influenced by Shaivite philosophy Prasad did not resign to pessimism and despondence. His creative imagination was as committed to 'Karuna' as to 'Ananda'. The most recurrent words in the writing of Prasad are the 'Karuna' and 'Madhu'; the

former a Buddhist concept while the latter the Vedic Aryan approach to life. What evolved from these influences is then *Anandvad* of Prasad which forms the bedrock of his writings, culminating, as we shall see in *Kamayani*.

Prasad published *Kamayani* three years after *Lahar*. It is the last and foremost work of the poet and the only epic authored by him. Speaking about the epic the poet said, "I am happy to have written it." His judgement of the work was fully vindicated when the posterity too upheld that it was his best work. Such apocalyptic view by the author himself about his work is rare in literature. Milton's favourite was *Paradise Regained* and not *Paradise Lost* though the posterity found it otherwise. *Kamayani* is said to be a *Rigvedic* allegory. Prasad also used sources for his work from *Shatpath Brahman, Bhagvat,* and *Chchandogya Upanishad*. Like Immanual Kant who had much in common with Shankara's *Vedanta,* Prasad dethroned stark logic and pure reasoning for the realisation of ultimate truth.

Structurally divided into 15 cantos, *Kamayani* celebrates the story of Kamayani (Shraddha) and Manu, the primeval beings who survived the legendary flood. Closely knitted with this story is the sub-plot of Ida, the intellect-born. Through a series of events and actions of the three (Shraddha, Manu and Ida), the poet drives home the ultimate truth of life which resides in the harmony of faith, intellect and action. Peace and bliss (anand) rest not in discord but concourse, not in individuality but in universality. Kamayani opens Manu's inner vision. It is in her light of devotion that Manu sees reality in truer perspective and urges her to enlighten him:

> A world of three directions and a trio
> Of spectrous points countenanced differently
> The symbols of three universes
> Resolutely rational and seen distinctly
> "What are these spheres?" inquired Manu,
> "Say Shraddha, what are these? Explain
> To what universe have I travelled unto !
> O lift me from this illusion, from this chain!"

The epic interprets growth of civilisation, advent and rise of science and industry, man's neglect of basic issues of life in the struggle for mere physical needs and their fulfilment and the subsequent fall. The epic does not however leave the reader at this

tragic end. Seeking to provide a complete answer it directs him to a proper course to find the meaning of existence in the strength of faith and experience as is evident in Manu's ultimate realisation. With his innate Shaivite faith, Prasad believed that literature's goal is not to end up with depiction of realism. Man's salvation lay in transcending the real by ideal. *Kamayani's* Manu does not come to a halt in love, ego, sex and plunder but is elevated to a state which is true destination of human journey, its sublimation:

> A harmony dwelt in life and matter
> The beauty itself was tangible
> One consciousness pervaded everwhere
> Bliss was profound, indivisible.
> ("Aanand")

In these last lines of the epic, Prasad intimates the state of sublimation where man becomes part of humanity. Rising above the spatial bonds obviously it points to the love the poet bears for the entire mankind. This is the hallmark of the greatest poet, as Whitman said in his preface to *Leaves of Grass:* "The known universe has one complete lover and that is the greatest poet. He consumes an eternal passion... The sea is not surer of the shore or the shore of the sea than he is of the fruition of his love and of all perfection and beauty".

As a poetic work, *Kamayani* bulges in music and artistic imagery. The brilliant images make the work highly pictorial and colourful underlying with moral purpose; spiritual and mystic suggestions. Said Dwivedi who compared Prasad with Tulsidas and Kabir, "Very few poets have succeeded in presenting such a wealth of vivid symbols and images as Prasad. And in these images there is little that is stale or conventional."*

Besides poetry, Prasad made a significant contribution to Hindi drama. He is considered as the next great figure after Prasad's position as playwright is of vital significance in the development of Hindi drama. He is next great figure after Bhartendu Harish Chandra. He wrote twelve plays at various points of time spanning over nearly twentythree years. His early plays which may be called one-act plays were published in "Indu". These were *Sajjan* (1911), *Kalyani Parinay* (1912), *Karunalaya* (1912), *Prayaschit* (1914) and *Rajya Shri* (1914). In book form his first play published was *Vishakh* (1921). In *Rajya Shri* and *Vishakh* for which he

* For detailed account, see introductory chapters of English translation of *Kamayani* by Manohar Bandopadhyay. Ankur 1978.

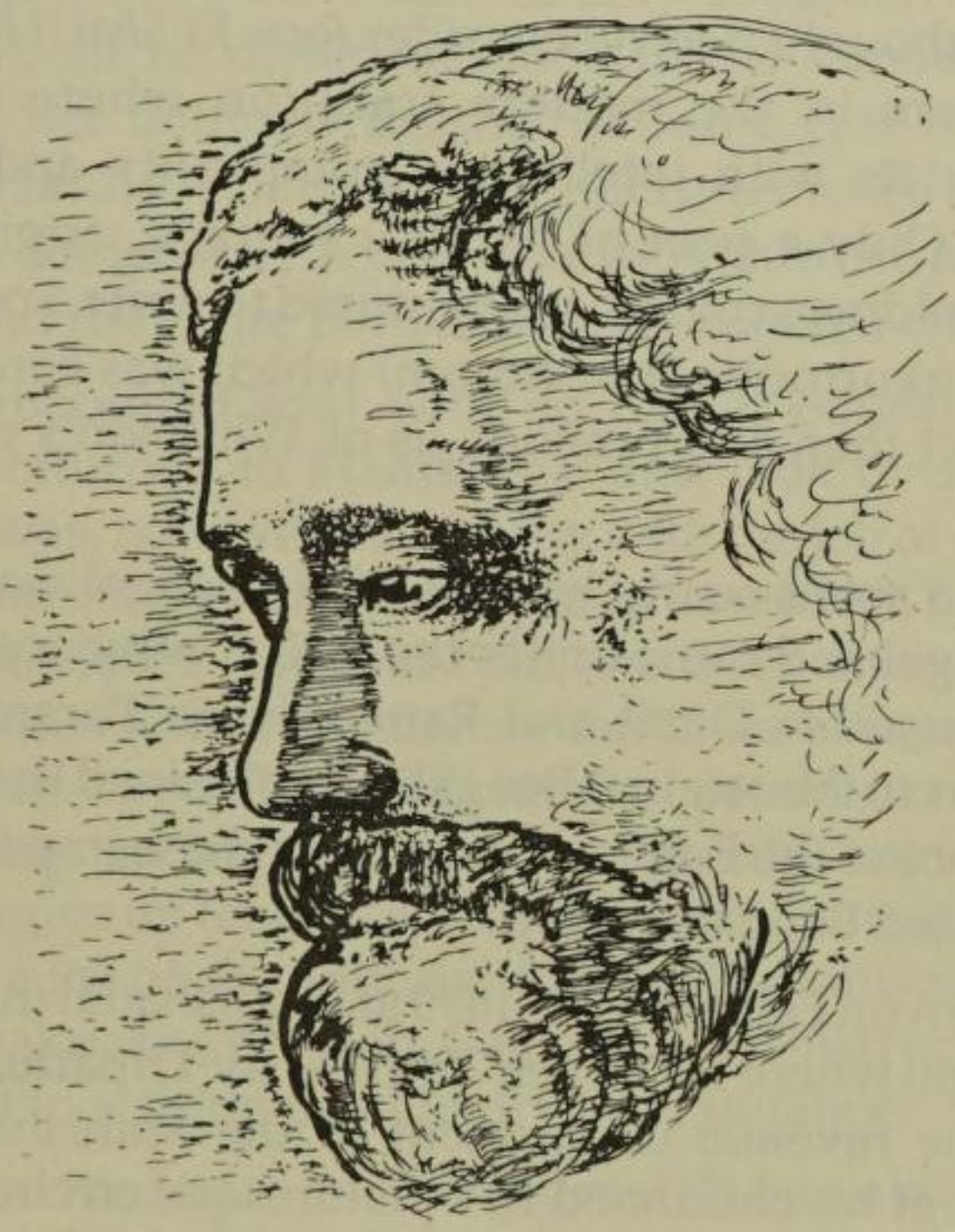
drew themes from history, Prasad made many changes subsequently. These early plays are helpful in the study of his artistic development as playwright.

Prasad's maturity as playwright and fruition of his art are seen in his historical plays: *Ajat Shatru* (1922), *Skund Gupt* (1922), *Chandragupt Mauriya* (1931) and *Dhruv Swamini* (1933). Even as marked with prolix characters and events these plays are great works of the author. He chose Pauranic theme for *Janmejaya Ka Nag Yagya* (1926) just as he had earlier done for *Sajjan* and *Karunalaya*. His two plays *Kamna* (1927) and *Ek Ghoont* (1929) are allegorical. The latter is less successful work of the author. Prasad seems to have been influenced by Tagore in *Kamna* just as by Bhartendu in *Vishakh*.

Prasad's plays in which his poetic talent is dominating are chiefly literary. These demonstrate his deep erudition, knowledge of history and poetic genius. He dealt with such issues as sacrifice, envy, hatred, deception etc. There is a blend of new and the old in his plays in that he sought to reconcile the real with ideal portraying the didactic and reformist themes. His plays belong to the world of idealism and romance. While remaining faithful to historical facts, Prasad did not sacrifice his artistic purpose. There is intellectual and philosophical content in his works. In *Ek Ghoont* he dealt with the theme of *Anandvad* which finds extended treatment in *Kamayani*. For their effective language, poetic flow and power to revoke history, Prasad's plays gave a new direction to Hindi drama.

Prasad wrote three novels; *Kankal* (1929), *Titli* (1933) and *Irawati*. The last one was published posthumously. In addition to his critical work, *Kavya Aur Kala* he authored five volumes of short stories: *Chchaya* (1912), *Pratidhwani* (1926), *Akash Dweep* (1929), *Aandhi* (1929) and *Indrajal* (1936). Thus with fourteen poetical works including one in Brij Bhasa, *Urvashi* (1909), Prasad authored during his creative span of twentyseven years or so, as many as thirtyfive books. It marks an extraordinary diversity of his talent in almost all forms of literature. And of course *Kamayani* is not only his greatest work, it is the greatest event in twentieth century Hindi literature.

Suryakant Tripathi Nirala



(1899–1961)

Most iconoclastic of all Hindi poets of this century, Suryakant Tripathi Nirala is to Hindi poetry what Whitman was to the American muse. A wonderful personality both in his life and writing (nirala means "strange"), he was a trail blazer of free verse in Hindi and one of the famous four Hindi Romantics, with Jayashankar Prasad, Sumitranandan Pant and Mahadevi Verma. In an age stuck in the classical mould of poetry writing, his bold and daring use of free verse not only shocked critics and editors, but created a furore in the Hindi poetic world. Yet, in spite of his being rejected by leading journals and scorned by critics, he lived

through the challenge and compelled recognition for his genius as the creater of *Tulsidas, Ram Ki Shakti Pooja* and *Kukurmutta,* as well as for his finest lyrics which are today the precious heritage of Hindi poetry.

All experiments in form and content as also new dimensions in thought patterns during the nineteen eighties owe a great deal to Nirala who combined in himself a strange blend of power, animation, love and empathy. The upholders of contemporary Vichar Kavita (thought poetry) consider *Ram Ki Shakti Pooja* as the first *vichar* poem in the modern tradition where emotional simplicity coexists with intellectual complexity and technical sophistication. Only a poet of Nirala's courage, originality and experimental boldness could have ventured to write a poem on the theme of the Kukurmutta (mushroom) which was considered an unpoetic subject then and reminds us of Whitman's great poem *Leave of Grass.*

Nirala, who spent nearly half his life in Bengal was *per se* the product of Bengal and came under the direct influence of Tagore, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Ramakrishna Paramhansa. He read their works in the original Bengali and obtained through them the best influence of the English Romantics whose impact had then deeply permeated Bengali poetry.

He was born on February 21, 1899 at Mahishadal in Mednapur district of Bengal where his father, Ram Sahay Tripathi, worked as the head of the revenue department of the Mahishadal estate. Nirala thus spent his childhood in a picturesque environment. He was hardly three years old when he lost his mother. He was named Suraj Kumar, which he changed to Suryakant during 1917-18. Later, when he joined the editorial staff of the Hindi journal "Matwala", he assumed the pseudonym of "Nirala". Though his mother-tongue was Hindi, he acquired an equal proficiency in Bengali. His early education was at home. He joined the Mahishadal High School at the age of 8 on Septembher 13, 1907. Like Tagore, he showed scant interest in the school curriculum and developed an innate hatred for examinations. He is said to have scribbed poems of the Hindi poet Padmakar in his maths examination. Not surprisingly, he could not proceed beyond the ninth standard. He, however, pored over his books at home and studied whatever literature was available in Hindi, Bengali, English and

Sanskrit and even took lessons in music. He had a melodious voice which he used to good effect when he recited his poems.

According to the tradition of the time, he was married at the age of 12, in 1911 to Manohara Devi at Dalmahu in the Rae Bareili district of Uttar Pradesh. His wife lived half the year in her parental home and the poet had to shuttle between Dalmahu and Mahishadal most of the time. His only son, Ramakrishna, was born at Dalmahu in 1914. Here also his only daughter, Saroj, was born in 1917, whom he commemorated in the famous poem "Saroj Smriti" on her untimely death. The same year his wife died in epidemic. Hardly had he overcome his grief when next year (1918) he lost his father. His house was thus thrown into a welter of disorder and the entire burden of his family fell on his shoulders.

A disappointed soul with no higher education to make a career, he returned to Mahishadal and took over the job of his father. He was, however, not happy with the job of collecting taxes from poor farmers and attending court cases. Yet, he continued his studies in his spare time and read whatever came his way. It was at this time that he came under the influence of Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement. It exerted so deep an impact upon his youthful mind that he soon resolved to give up feudal service for literary pursuits. Fortunately, he secured a job on the editorial staff of "Samanway", brought out by the Ramakrishna Mission, Calcutta. It opened up a new horizon for the poet in writing and literary acquaintance.

Nirala moved on to another journal, "Matwala", in 1923. In this journal he published his poem, "Gaye Roop Pahchan", under the pseudonym of "Nirala". Hereafter he was known to the Hindi world as "Nirala". He had, however, composed his famous poem "Joohi Ki Kali", at the age of 17 in 1916, which is considered a great artistic achievement of the time. This poem was published in the eighth number of "Matwala". Nirala employed free verse in this poem, like the other two poems of his early period, "Adhiwas" and "Panchwati Prasang". The poem embodied all the traits of Chhayavad, which was to typify the Hindi literary era 1918-38. Nirala considered "Joohi Ki Ḳali" as his first poem. He remained with "Matwala" until 1918. This was a difficult time for the poet. Hindi journalism paid very poorly in those days and with that meagre income he had to maitain a family of six or seven members. He was, however, immensely rewarded by the journal in so far as

through it he came into contact with the literary luminaries of his time.

By now the poet had managed to publish his volume of poems *Anamika* (1922). The second part of *Anamika* was published 16 years later in 1938. In the poems of this collection, Nirala did not only use free verse but also questioned the puritanic ideals of the time which were dominated by the archaic dictates of Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, a Dr. Johnson type clinging to the wilting poetic traditions then prevailing. For such an iconoclastic step, he was met with strong protests from all quarters and uncharitable handling by reviewers. As a consequence, his second collection of 78 poems, *Parimal*, which was ready by 1925, could not attract any publisher and he had to wait for about five years for its appearance. It was in this collection that he wrote his preface in 23 pages advocating the western tradition of free verse and the unrhymed stanza of the *Vedas*. He urged the traditionalists to come out of their sluggish poetic ideas and look with an open mind at poetic developments in the west. "Where there is freedom there is no bondage, either among men or in poetry," he said. Hindi poetry then was an intricate web of matras and varnas (syllables and letters) and writing in that form was considered to be the test of a genius. Obviously, it was to prove his ability that Nirala divided *Parimal* into three parts, the first part containing poems written in the strict forms of the established prosody and in metrical stanzas. In the second part he introduced unrhymed poems in the Sanskrit tradition, while in the third he published poems in free verse. *Parimal* contains some of famous poems of Nirala like "Adhiwas", "Kan", "Yum aur Main", "Bhikshuk" and of course "Joohi Ki Kali". The poems are a belnd of monistic reverie, patriotism, humanism, mysticism and a nostalgic love for nature and the past. His mysticism draws on the real world rather than seeking to withraw from it. The poet builds an image of the oppressed poor on the theme of a straw, in the poem "Kan".

Trampled underfoot for ages
you suffer oppression without protest
and offer in return a soft pad to walk
Yet, alas, you are abused and crushed
by the same tramplers!

In these poems are seen for the first time the free and natural expression of individual genius. Ingrained with features that were to later characterise Hindi romanticism, the poems indicate a

revolutionary change in diction and sensibility. Notably, Nirala had not by then come in direct contact with the Hindi romantics. Yet, he was far ahead of his time; many features that were to blossom in the poetry of the fifties are seen three decades earlier in his work. One typical poem is "Bhikshuk" that unfolds the poet's personal sympathy for a beggar:

He comes
tearing his throat ruefully
on the street
his belly clinging to his spine
He walks leaning on a stick
for a handful of grain
and spreads out his tattered old wallet
to overcome his hunger!

Meanwhile Nirala had moved in 1928 to a publishing firm in Lucknow, where the famous Hindi novelist Premchand too worked in another publishing firm, having resigned his job as a teacher. Scores of his works, written earlier, were published in this period and he began to work on his novels and short stories that were to appear in subsequent years. He was a familiar figure in Hazratganj, identifiable by his unique dress and appearance. He was six feet tall and handsome; wore a khadi kurta with lungi and chappals. Even though he was a Brahmin, he ate meat, a habit he had picked up in Bengal. After some time, on his friend's advice he shifted to Allahabad, the seat of Hindi literature and learning at the time. It was here that he came in direct contact with Sumitranandan Pant, Jayashankar Prasad and Mahadevi Verma. His association with these poets was lifelong. At Allahabad he took part in literary and political meetings. Sarojini Naidu is said to have been deeply moved by his poem, "Badal Raag", which he once recited to her exclusively. This poem, written when he was 21, in 1920, bears the influence of Byron and of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind":

Even then, as busy as now,
I wrote unremittingly
poems in free verse
and the editors would rejoice
in returning them with a two-line regret.

If by now Hindi readers had ceased to make fun of Nirala's poetry, critics by and large still had reservations about his talent.

To them poetry could not be imagined without a rhyme-scheme. Incidentally, there was a deplorable dearth of literary songs in Khariboli Hindi. Prasad had filled this void to some extent in his plays. Nirala's next collection, *Gitika,* was a welcome arrival in 1936. This volume, containing 101 songs, was hailed by Prasad as "a magnificent gift to Hindi literature". Prasad's approval of the volume helped the poet win recognition from literary giants. For the first time, an attempt was made to assimilate western and Indian music in Hindi poetry, as is discernible in the poems of this collection. This was indicated by Nirala himself in his foreword. The collection contains lyrics on love, nature and human beauty. There is in it also a strain of mysticism. The best-known love song of the Hindi world, "Var De, Veena-Vadini Var De!", is contained in this collection. The lyrics, however, do not wallow in sentimentalism but manifest the poet's concern with reality and the toiling class.

Till now, Nirala's poetry had demonstrated his artistic perfection besides asserting firmly new forms and a change in sensibility. His maturity of thought and critical outlook on life and literature found their best expression in the poems of the second volume of *Anamika* published in 1938. It contains some of the most famous poems of Hindi Romanticism, "Saroj Smriti", "Todti Pathar" and "Ram Ki Shakti Pooja". In the former poem, which is a poignant elegy upon the death of his daughter, he records the torments of rejection by the literary establishment.

The poet takes a distinct departure in "Saroj Smriti", for the autobiographical element is seldom a feature of Hindi Romantic poetry.

Nirala's next book, *Tulsidas* (1939), which is considered the last work of Hindi romanticism, not only depicts the legends abounding in the early life of the poet Tulsidas, but also attempts a serious study of the critical mind of the poet. Allegorically, the three poems, "Saroj Smriti", "Ram Ki Shakti Pooja" and *Tulsidas* deal with a battle on three planes—social, political and literary.

Kukurmutta (1942) is a satire where the poet's irony and agonised life are vividly portrayed. The very choice of subject, mushroom, shocked Hindi readers. The akavita pioneers or anti-poets of the seventies drew their inspiration from this poem. The social concern of the poet permeated all his works published in subsequent years: *Anima* (1943), *Bela* (1946), *Naye Pattey* (1946),

Archana (1950), *Aradhana* (1953) and *Geet Gunj* (1954). *Sandhya Kalki* was published posthumously in 1969. In the later works, he tended towards progressivism and social criticism. His irony became increasingly trenchant. In the end, he turned again to writing gentle and reflective poems and at times devotional ones.

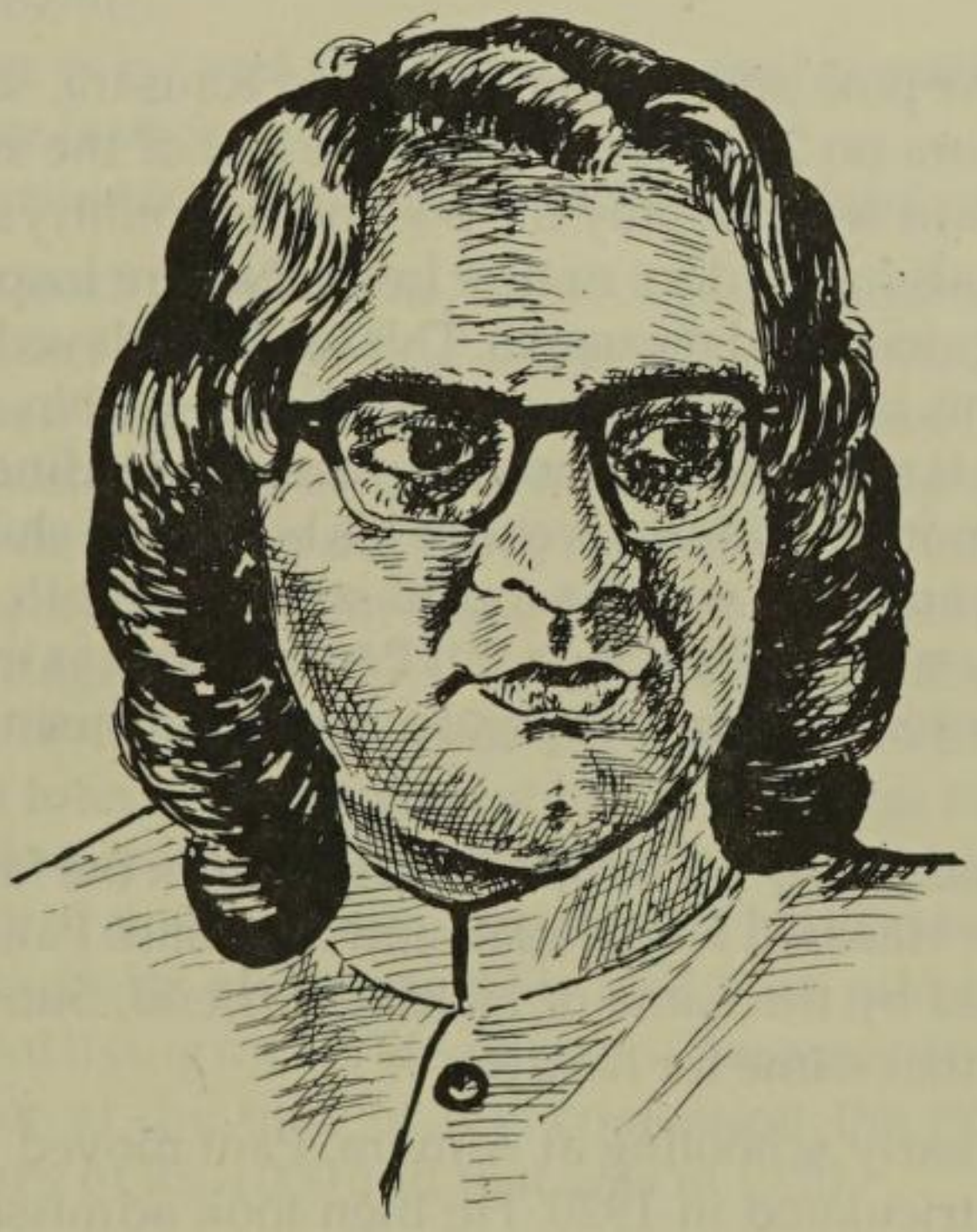
In nearly two dozen short stories and a novel, *Billesur Bakariha,* that he published, the life of the lower middle class and the poor and oppressed of the thirties came vividly alive. His critical outlook on life and literature may be seen in his three dozen essays that were brought together in various collections.

Author of 13 poetical books that constitute nearly 1000 poems, Nirala was also a prose writer par excellence. He exposed the evils in his novels and short stories. He authored seven novels; *Apsara, Alka, Nirupma, Prabhawati, Kulli Bhat, Choti Ki Pakad* and *Kaale Kaarname.*

Nirala lived in utter economic hardship throughout his life. Yet he was charitable beyond imagination and helped the needy, forsaking his own urgent needs. He gave away the prize of Rs. 2100, presented to him by the UP Government, to a friend's widow. His generous gifts to rickshaw pullers are well-known legends in Hindi literary biographies. He died on October 15, 1961.

By all yardsticks, Nirala is modern even today. His poetry and prose works have been relevant to all successive movements; romanticism, progressivism, experimentalism, the new poetry, anti-poetry and even to thought poetry. The urgency and the colloquial vigour he lent to Hindi poetry brought it close to the common man. Sympathy for the poor, love of freedom and anger against exploitation were the sovereign traits of his creative personality. He rebuffed Hindi poets befuddled by their inferiority complex and asked them to raise their heads high before world litterateurs. If he admired western poetry, he did not approve of all that was being written and condemned outright those Hindi poets who were trying to ape western poets or even Tagore. "I have time and again written that Carlyle or Ruskin, Shelley or Rabindranath Tagore can never be ideals for Hindi authors." He wished the Hindi poets to stand on their own as he did himself, firm and invincible against all odds.

Sumitranandan Pant



(1900–1977)

Sumitranandan Pant was one of the Romantic quartet in Hindi poetry. Like his English Romantic counterpart, Wordsworth, Pant's contribution to Hindi poetry stretched over a long period of nearly sixty years more than any other poet's in our century. He, (with Prasad and Nirala), not only pioneered Hindi Romantic poetry—*Chhayavad* but also compatriated other trends like *Rahasyavad* (mysticism) and *Pragativad* (progressivism) and lived through other major trends in Hindi poetry; the *Prayogvad* (experimentalism) *Nai Kavita* (new poetry), *A-Kavita* (anti-poetry); and even *Vichar Kavita* (thought poetry) that emerged a few years ago.

Winner of the prestigious Jnanpith award in 1968 for his epic work *Chidambara,* Pant won various other credentials and awards including the Sahitya Akademi award of 1960 for his noted work *Kala Aur Budha Chand* (Art and the Aged Moon). He was elected Fellow of the Sahitya Akademi in 1969 when the Akademi conferred the distinction on such eminent men as Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, C. Rajagopalachari, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay and D.R. Bendre.

Born at the pine and deodar shrouded Kausani, some 50 kms north of Almora on 20 May, 1900, on the feet of the snow-bound Himalayas, Pant was not only the poet of the countryside in body and soul but also an ardent nature lover. Nature inspired him in all his writings in varied measures. This kinship played a great role in his life as his mother (Saraswati Devi) died within six hours of his birth. One is reminded of another great poet in Hindi, Tulsidas, who lost his mother within a week of his birth. The child Pant was reared by his aunt. He was the fourth son and eighth child in the family. His father, Pandit Gangadatt Pant worked as manager in a nearby tea garden and ran independently a good business as wood merchant.

He was named by his father as Gosaidatt in the fashion of his other brother: Hardatt, Raghvadatt and Devidatt. Pant was, however fascinated by the name of Hardatt's friend, Sumitranandan and adopted that name for his own.

After his early schooling at Almora, Pant moved to Varanasi where he matriculated in 1920. He then took admission in Muir College, Allahabad but gave up his studies in response to Gandhiji's call to join the non-cooperation movement. This was the end of his academic career though politics too could not attract him for long, as he was destined to live as a poet. He had, by now, won applause for his poetry in and around student circles. It is said that at a poetry seminar in 1920, when he recited his poem, *Chhaya,* the audience was so charmed by the poem that even the famous poet Hariaudh who was presiding over the function took off his own garlands and decorated the adolescent poet.

Whereas Prasad was moved by so-called feminism and Nirala by virility, Pant's source of inspiration was, both incipiently and perennially, the nature; nature in its most tender and delicate aspects. The poems of *Veena* which is the first work of the poet, are a lucid lyric of nature. With this dawns the Hindi Romantic era

which was to last for nearly two decades until 1936. Nature appears in various disguises and variegated moods and facets. The poet discovers a lover in nature and is eager to know its true identity. Following is the excerpt from his famous lyric of this early period:

> Who is that, mother, that plays alone over that greenery?
> Who is that who plays in her own fashion?
> Her plate of heart is adorned in sports and tender curiosities.
> There is joy and sweetness and a peal of smile,
> There is urge and pent-up fear,
> There is sport, excitement and simple jubilation.

His next work *Granthi* (The Tie) evoked a great deal of curiosity among his admirers regarding the poet's personal life. In it the lover (the poet) describes how his boat capsized and how when he regained consciousness, he found himself in the lap of a beautiful girl. And yet despite their deep love for each other, so the narration goes, both were separated forever since the society did not approve of their marriage. The readers have felt that the dejection of the lover in the poem is the experience of the poet himself. But the poet denied in an interview to Vishambhar Manav that the love affair of the poem had really anything to do with his own life. Then what is the mystery of a man of sound means and handsome personality living as a bachelor all through his life? Pant said he could not afford a decent living for his life-partner. One cannot but doubt this reasoning, for at the time of this confession the poet earned a monthly salary of Rs. 1000 and that was in 1950.

In his introduction to *Pallava* (1926), Pant gave further fillip to the Romantic movement and a host of poets of his generation came under his sweeping influence. He had studied by now the English Ramantic poets, Tagore and Sarojini Naidu and had greatly enriched himself from their experience, practice and knowledge. *Parivartan, Aansu, Visarjan* and *Uchhwas* are some of the famous poems of this collection. *Parivartan* was highly praised by Nirala. *Pallava* demonstrates the poet's consummation of style and intellectual development. "I did not do anything", the poet said, "between 1924-28". In the following year (1929) he translated Omer Khayyam's *Rubaiyyat*. Its sequel *Gunjan* (1930), which marks the poet's shift from nature to man, displays his richer imagination and resonant diction. "Muskan", "Nauka Vihar," and "Ek Tara" are some significant poems of this collection. Here the poet feels the

world must change and needs be changed: "I am painfully baffled/the world needs a new life..."

A new phase began in Pant's poetic development with the appearance of his *Yugant* (1935) which heralded a new trend in Hindi poetry, the Pragativadi (progressivist) poetry. His study of Marxism had opened a new dimension to his vision and his creative sensitivity. "I had reached this conclusion in *Yugant,*" said he, "that the last phase of human civilization would come to an end and a new era will surely set in." He carries the same conviction in *Yugvani* (1940) which the critics have called the poetic manifesto and the voice of Indian Communism. He pleads for a material change and uplift of the downtrodden:

> Today the truth, the beauty, the good
> Are confined in the classes and divisions.
> The culture with roots on the top
> Has certainly to find roots below on the earth.

He paints with same compassion and ardour the poverty, backwardness and exploitation of the Indian peasants and women in *Gramya* (1940). All the same, we know Pant did not pin credence in dialectic materialism of Marx and desired for a better world order where spiritual force and material progress reinforced each other.

Pant came under Aurobindo's influence in 1946 when he visited the *Yogi* at Pondicherry. This was again a turning point for the poet. In 1947 when his next book *Swarn Kiran* appeared, he was a different poet. He appears as seer and philosopher, his vision and sensibility thoroughly coloured by Aurobindo's views on life and matter. The subsequent works, *Swarn Dhooli* (1948), *Yugpath* (1948) and *Uttara* (1949) depict the poet's inner exploration in self-awakening, spiritualism and a hope for the emergence of new humanism. Evidently it is on account of new areas of interest that the poet remained new and fresh in the long span of his writing. Or else there is every fear of repetition and even going back to one's own poems for subject matter. As William Carlos Williams pointed out, "You can put it down as a general rule that when a poet, in the broadest sense, begins to devote himself to the subject matter of his poems, *genre,* he has come to an end of his poetic means." Happily Pant had no compulsion to fall in such trap. The influence of Aurobindo which pulsates in his other works, *Vani* (1957) and *Kala Aur Boodha Chand* (1958), finds its culmination in the epoch-making

epic *Lokayatan* (1964), which is one of the four great Hindi epics of the century; the other being Hariaudh's *Priya Prawas*, Maithili Sharan Gupta's *Saket* and Prasad's *Kamayani*. This epic of nearly 23,000 lines has been considered as the most representative piece of poetry in Hindi which attempted to visualise and predict the future of mankind in India. Its origin may be traced back to 1942 when the poet had unsuccessfully planned to found *Lokayan* a cultural institution of a unique kind.

The post-*Lokayatan* works of the poet are: *Kiran Veena* (1966), *Pau Phatne Se Pahale* (1967), *Patjhar: Ek Bhav Kranti* (1971), *Shankh Dhwani* (1971) and *Satyakam* (1975). A large number of poems of these works have been anthologized in various collections, the most significant of which is *Richa* brought out in 1971 in the preface of which the poet examined his own writings over the years *vis-a-vis* the Romantic development.

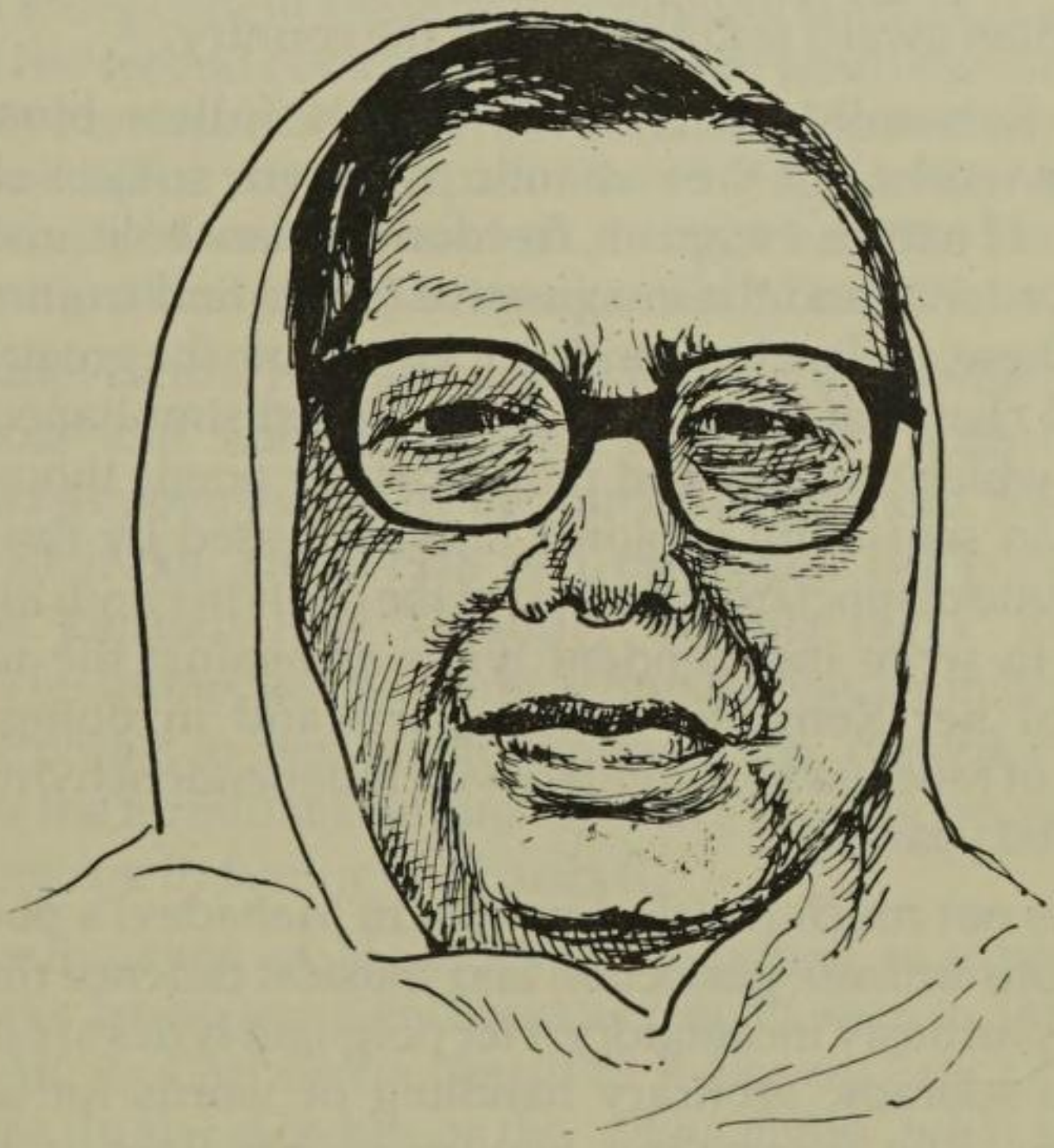
Pant was connected with the All India Radio between 1950-57 and wrote for it several verse plays which include *Rajat Shikhar* (1949), *Shilpi* (1951) and *Sauvarna* (1952). Earlier in 1934 he had attempted a play *Jyotsna* which bears the tangible influence of the symbolistic style of Maeterlink. He wrote various critical essays and a novel *Haar* in 1915. Manuscript of *Haar* is preserved in Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha Library today. He authored a collection of short stories *Paanch Kahaniyan* in 1936.

Amidst his heavy literary activities Pant took keen interest in various other fields which extended from palmistry to medicine. Among few journals he cared to preserve was a palmistry journal published from Bangalore. He evinced great interest in stagecraft and folk dances. Coming into contact with Uday Shankar between 1941-44 he even wrote songs for his film *Kalpana* (1944). Together with Narendra Sharma he brought out *Rupabh*, a literary monthly, from Kalakankar in 1938 which in course of time emerged as a powerful forum of progressive writings in Hindi.

Pant died at New Delhi on December 28, 1977. His literary career was a voyage from nature to man and from man to divinity. For readers of Hindi poetry he is ever a bard of nature whose muse is one with the tune and rhythm of nature:

> The bustle of the dusk
> looms over bamboo thistles
> and the birds chirp cheerily:
> Tee ! Bee ! Tee ! Tut, tut !

Mahadevi Verma



(1907–1987)

The Meera of modern Hindi poetry, as Mahadevi Verma was popularly known, occupied the Hindi Romantic stage as one of the stalwarts and enjoyed the esteem and reverence of the successive generations even fifty years after the Romantic period had historically ended.

Mahadevi Verma differed from other romantics as most poets do from each other. But quintessentially she remained a Romantic bard in thought, spirit and style. She delved into mystic realms deeper than her other counterparts and wrote her poignant, sad hymns as if to make the world happy reminding them of the Shelleyan credo: "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

The Bhartiya Jnanpith indeed honoured itself in 1983 honouring the then 76 year old poetess for her immortal work *Yama* which treasures the poems written as early as over four decades ago. The award set a great significance in that none less than the British Premier Margaret Thatcher presented it to the poetess on November 28 that year in New Delhi. With this Mahadevi Verma became the first Hindi poetess and the third woman author to receive the greatest Indian award for literature in the country.

Hindi Romantic poetry assumes its fullest blossom in Mahadevi's works. All the romantic traits, viz; subjectivity, personification of nature, escapism, freedom, melancholic undertone, the lyrical cadence and the imaginative flights find fruition in her works. Of these, melancholy and lyric constitute the greatest force, vitality and charm of her poetry characterised simultaneously by mysticism which sustains and reinforces her poetic thought. The deep woman sensibility explored and expressed by the poetess make her quite distinct from the rest of the poets in Hindi literature. She chose to write independent lyrics as against the narrative sequence of her Romantic counterparts and in doing so she reminds us of Meera who wrote likewise independent hymns some four hundred years ago.

There is not much metrical variety in Mahadevi's poetry but there is a consummate perfection and musical cadence that make her lines rapturously incantatory. Her poignant lyrics are in chaste Hindi with sporadic arbitrary handling of words for assonant convenience. The fascinating feature of her lines is that her philosophy never looms a burden on her cadence. The aphorism rather bursts forth in a musical flow as Yeats came to realise in later years when he said, "I notice that the more precise and learned the thought, the greater the beauty, the passion; the intricacy and subtleties of the imagination are the lengths and depth of the furrow made by the passion."

Eldest daughter of a school headmaster, Govind Prasad Verma, Mahadevi was born on the day of Hindu festival, Holi, on March 26, 1907 in Farrukhabad in Uttar Pradesh. Her father was known for his learning and scholarship. Her mother Hemrani Devi was of deep religious temperament and valued Indian culture and learning which eventually influenced Mahadevi too. Her great love for ancient Sanskrit literature and the Vedic way of life manifest for large measure this influence. She was admitted to

Mission School in Indore at the age of five. She learnt music, painting and various Indian languages in addition to English. Her education was interrupted when at the age of 12, in 1916 she was married to Swarup Kumar Verma. She, however, could not compromise with her married life and went to live with her parents to resume further studies. Even when pressures were made, on her completion of BA, she refused to go to her in-laws and determined to live an independent life. She was already famous as a poet and authored her second book of poems, *Rashmi* when she did her M.A. in Sanskrit literature in 1932 from Allahabad university. She was soon appointed as the Principal of the Prayag Mahila Vidyapeeth with which she was associated all through her life. She was also the honorary editor of the famous journal "Chand".

Mahadevi wrote her early poetry in Brij Bhasa in metric stanzas mostly 'rola' and 'harigitika'. Some of her early poems were not considered as poetry at all by her puritanic teachers. She began to write in Khariboli since 1918 and published her poems in the renowned journals like "Chand", "Mahila Jagat" and "Arya Mahila". Her immediate and timely break-away from Brij Bhasa to Khariboli points to her revolutionary spirit, distant vision and insight for the formidable influence of Brij Bhasa soon vanished in Hindi literature in favour of Khariboli.

Primarily, even as Mahadevi was known as a poetess, her prose works are no less significant as may be seen in *Shrinkhala Ki Kadiyan, Atit Ke Chal Chitra, Smriti Ki Rekhayen, Path Ke Sathi* and *Sapta Parna*. In the sketches or the 'rekha chitra' what she called, she created and enriched a powerful form in Hindi. Her prose pulsates with poetic ecstasy, brilliant erudition and sharp observations of life and literature. Her thoughts have been greatly influenced from the reading of the Vedic and ancient Indian scriptures. She has authored nearly twenty books in prose and poetry. Her poetical works are *Neehar* (1930), *Rashmi* (1932), *Neerja* (1934), *Sandhya Geet* (1936) and *Deep Shika* (1942). The first four works comprising 185 poems were published in a single volume entitled *Yama* in 1939 which is considered a landmark in Hindi poetry and is the magnum opus of the poetess. Thus her major poetic works on which her reputation greatly rests were composed and published over forty years ago.

Commenting about her own works Mahadevi once observed, "During the period of *Neehar* my experiences overflowed in sorrow

and anxiety in the same way as a child is stirred in excitement at the sight of silent bright dawn. *Rashmi* was written at a time when I valued thought more than emotion. *Neerja* and *Sandhya Geet* depict that aspect of my mental state which is a blend of spontaneous harmony of joy and sorrow". True to this credence her entire works are commingled with the traits of pain and sorrow which are pervasively dominant even in her joyous lyrics. As Kabir said of himself, "Dukhia Das Kabir", she too finds herself pitted in an eternal stream of sorrow from which she hardly even seeks to escape and discovers; instead she discovers her true anchorage in it. "I searched you in the pain, And shall now search pain in you." This pessimistic feature would appear very paradoxical to those who have found her ever in cheerful smiles. She herself explains this weird personality. "Sorrow", she says, "is such a poetic force of my life that has the capability of holding the entire world in one tie.... It can hold the personal life in the life of the universe and personal pain in the pain of the universe". Yet sorrow is not the defeatist view of her life. Quite unflinchingly as she herself made her way despite personal griefs she cheered up her readers. "Those are not the feet which would accept defeat. You are not the ones to retreat. No, you cannot surrender your resolves to obstacles".

The poems of *Neehar* (Frost) were written during, 1924 to 1929. These display felicitous personification of nature with mystic overtone. In changing moods of nature the poetess finds reflection of her own aspirations and dejections. Yet there is a youthful flamboyance and apparent expression of her love in the facets of nature though in controlled idiom, "O that hour of the quiet tryst! / When the clouds hovering all the night failed / To obstruct my path or dampen my pace to my direction!" The art and craftsmanship of the poet tends maturer with *Rashmi,* a collection of thirtyfive poems. It is also thematically varied and broad. There is an extension of individual self to the universal consciousness with the influence of Buddhism becoming prominent in the poems. The poet finds emanence of her lover (God) in the entire universe: "Sarva Khalvidam Brahma". *Neerja* (Cloud) is an important milestone in the poetic development of the poetess. It is a collection of fiftyeight poems, superbly excellent both in comprehension and expressive power. The poetess seems to have come over her earlier melancholy and moves on a buoyant place of faith and assurance. The metaphysical relationship with her lover, the Absolute is

expressed in a shade more clear. The poetess seeks total extinction of her personality in the union, "Gleaming in that bright splendour you must yourself destroy in the union." This reminds one of Meera who in her total surrender sought to become one with her lover, Lord Krishna.

The poetess further advanced from the fold of her loneliness and seclusion in the poems of *Sandhya Geet* (Song of Twilight). These poems are far more refined and enriched in subtlety of thought and metaphoric variety. She is however plagued with a feeling of incompleteness and vacuity. A long voyage awaits her further, "Awake, for you have much distances to measure". The poetess celebrates various facets of evening in these poems against the backdrop of her translucent consciousness. Quite often she sinks in a frenzied rapture. She informs her friend how her lover is above temporal accretions, "He is eternal, my dear I am wedded to Him every moment".

Most of the songs of *Deep Sikha* (Flame of Candle) are on the theme of lamp which is the symbol of physical body. Like the lamp burns itself to illumine the path of travellers, the body too must suffer to render service to mankind. The poetess is hence influenced by the Buddhist doctrine and yearns for the universal good. This is conspicuous at the very outset of the volume whereas she intimates, "Unwavering, untrembling burn my candle/ None must go astray in the dark / Nor even the bird from its course." It deserves here mention that the poetess had once longed to become a Buddhist nun. Her rich reading of Buddhist literature manifests in varied way in the poems of the collection, greater than in *Rashmi.* Those who disagree about her Buddhist influence need no further testimony than the lines wherein she declares her credence in quite crystal terms: "Every step turned a thousand blessings/ My path was then the Nirvana itself."

The poetess becomes mystic when she addresses her lover, the invisible absolute power whose emanence she begins to feel in herself. It demonstrates her faith in non-dualism. "What need have I to worship Him! My brief life is already a temple of the Eternal". The pathos and the melancholy of her early poems thus transform to a deep spiritual intensity.

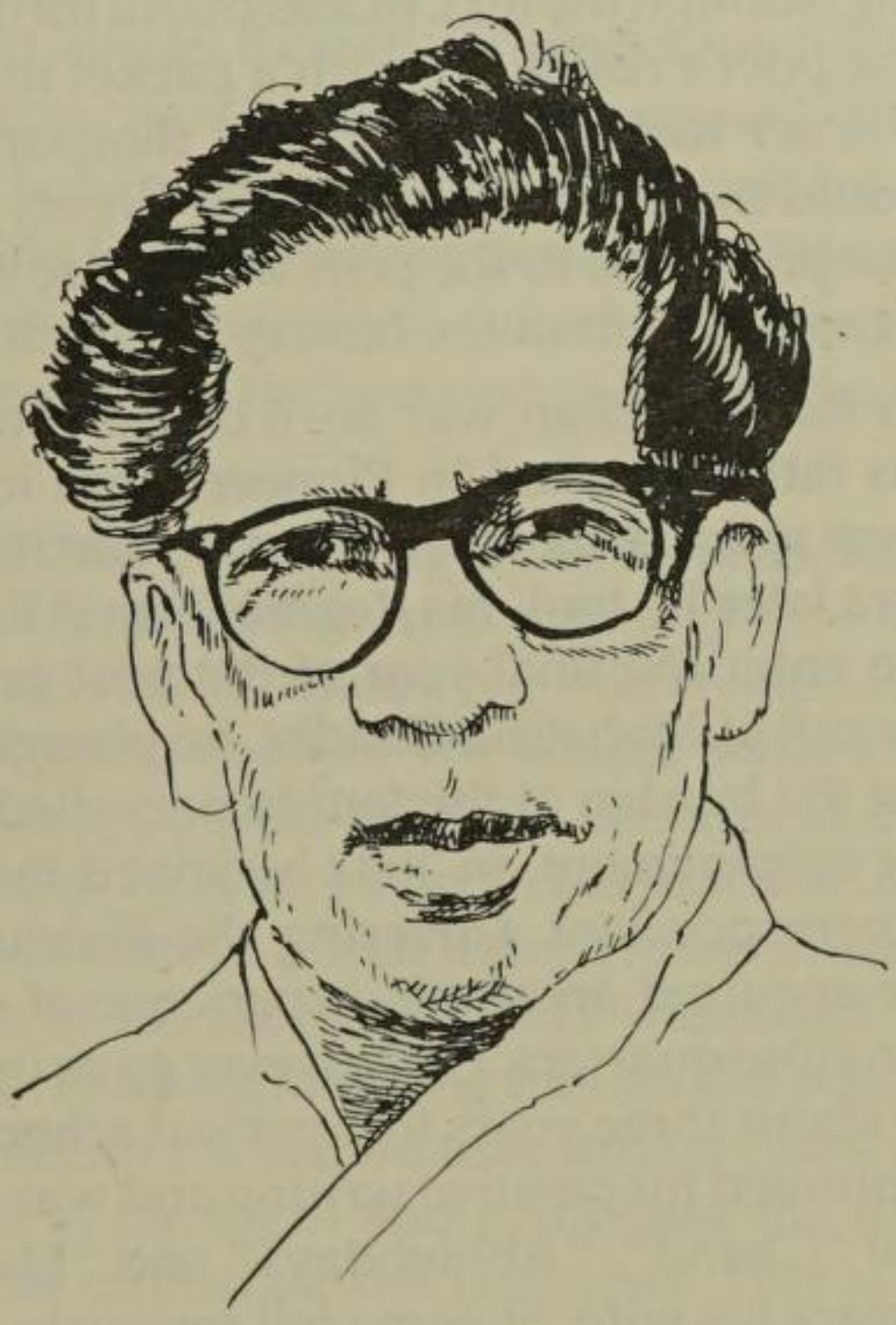
A poet of sublime she valued the discipline and order in writing. Her metaphor as such draws on a loftier aesthetic plane rather than flashing in amorous utterance. An accomplished

painter she observed the nature with an artist's eye which aptly explains the pictorial element dominant in her writing. Of the various aspects of nature she was mostly moved by the clouds, stars, water and the splendour of moon. These find a new treatment in each poem freshly. Perhaps the cloud is the chief attraction of the poetess whose fond colour is the 'blue' and the best season is the rainy season, "I am the sorrowful cloud of tears that rose yesterday to dissolve today".

Mahadevi was as dedicated to teaching as to her poetry. For nearly fifty years she was connected with teaching and became synonymous with the institution, the Prayag Mahila Vidyapeeth. She had even a greater role to play in the national mainstream which dates back to 1942 when she served the helpless dependents of those who were arrested in the Quit India Movement. And with a view to improve the lot of authors she had founded the authors' parliament, 'Sahitya Sansad' to which cause she earmarked part of the earning of Jnanpith award. She died on September 11, 1987.

Songs of Mahadevi however sad are already the household preserves in north India and are hummed as rapturously as those of Meera. The educated masses find them yet more stimulating and relevant for the embodying rational-thought of modern ethos and secular strain in her poetry. If Prasad would be known for his epic *Kamayani* and Nirala for his *Tulsidas*, Mahadevi would go down in history for all time to come for her poignant songs that would move to tears even the hardiest of souls.

Harivansh Rai Bachchan



(1907–)

More than half a century ago it had become a fashion among the educated youth of the north to hum the lines from *Madhushala* (1935). This was a period when romantic poetry in Hindi was at its height and the stalwarts who reigned supreme were: Prasad, Pant, Nirala and subsequently Mahadevi Verma. Bachchan's arrival on the scene and his instant popularity was quite a storm. The *raison d' tre* of this storm was the poet's ability to draw his listeners to earthly realities as against the imaginative flights, escapism and abstraction of the romanticists which the Hindi lovers of poetry had enough and Bachchan provided fresh pastures. But then he also exploited the people's passion for Urdu poetry.

Few poets have enjoyed such popularity as Bachchan has, who stands out in Hindi poetry by himself. His *Madhushala* became popular much before its publication in 1935. Earlier he had translated Omer Khayyam's *Rubaiyyat* into Hindi and authored a small volume of poems *Tera Har* (1932). There is an interesting episode about the publication of *Madhushala*. To print the book at his own cost, Bachchan had left the manuscript with a printer to furnish the rates after going through the text. In less than a fortnight the printer appeared at the poet's residence with a packet in hand. It turned out that the printer had already printed thousand copies of the book and also sold the entire lot except the twenty complimentary copies which he presented to the poet with his royalty. We are yet to see such fortunate event in the history of Hindi poetry.

Harivansh Rai Bachchan was born on November 27, 1907 at Allahabad. His father worked in Pioneer Press in the town. The poet had not yet graduated when he was married to Shyama in 1927. Two years later he took his degree from Allahabad University. He was to enter the final year of the post graduation when inspired by the call of Mahatma Gandhi, he plunged into freedom movement. But the burden of the family prevailed on him and he had to look for employment. In 1932 he joined the English daily, "Pioneer" as correspondent. Covering the district courts in this assignment, he acquired an ample experience of cross-section of the people from close quarters. He however gave up the job in 1932 and taught for about three years in Agarwal school at Allahabad. Sidelong he continued his creative writing and was connected with the editorials of "Chand", "Abhiyodaya" and "Madari" journals. During these years his wife, Shyama fell seriously ill and the poet had to attend on her. He was then writing the quatrains of *Halahal*, his *magnum opus*. In 1936, Shyama was operated upon in Patna where she breathed her last.

The untimely demise of his wife and her pathetic sufferance earlier caused a grievous wound on the poet's youthful soul. Eventually he remained a virtual recluse for about a year. It was only in November 1937, when he resumed his pen and wrote the first line of *Nisha Nimantran*. He also resumed his studies this year and attended university. He passed M.A. in English literature in 1939. After doing a diploma in basic teaching from Varanasi in 1940, he joined Allahabad University as a research scholar.

By now Bachchan had published his poetic volumes in rapid succession. These were: *Madhubala* (1936), *Madhu Kalash* (1937),

Nisha Nimantran (1938), *Ekant Sangeet* (1939), *Akul Antar* (1943) and *Satrangini* (1945). The first collection contains some of his early poems which fail to make an impact. In the second work, the poet replies to the charges levelled against him. The poignant, short and musical poems of *Nisha Nimantran* are however steeped in lyrical intensity which the critics consider as the best poems of the poet. Similar traits of loneliness, vacuity, remorse and utter despair mark the poems of *Ekant Sangeet* though with lesser intensity. The poems of *Akul Antar* are also characterised by anguish and despair. During this period Bachchan lived with the noted romantic poet, Sumitranandan Pant at the latter's residence, "Vasudha" at Allahabad. The sojourn here proved quite fruitful for the poet who wrote at this place some of the best poems later included in *Halahal* (1946).

The year 1942 was the turning point in Bachchan's life. This year he married Teji, a teacher in psychology in F.C. College at Lahore. Her arrival in his life filled a big void created after the death of his first wife Shyama in 1936. The couple settled at Allahabad where the poet was appointed as Junior Lecturer in English literature at the university. In 1944, he begot his first son, Amitabh who is today the famous actor in Hindi films. However the illness, and consequent death of his mother in 1945 was a sad interregnum during this period. Nursing his ailing mother the poet watched the grim struggle for life for the second time in nine years. He sat beside her till late hours in the night and composed the final verses of *Halahal,* which was published the next year. This is the work by which he is known to Hindi world down this day. He spent ten long years in composing the poems of the volume of which first fifteen quatrains he had sent to "Saraswati" for publication in February 1936.

The poems of *Halahal* pulsate with lyricism and erudition made simple to the comprehension of common man. The poet draws attention to the infinitesimal nature of man before the infinite universe. The volume shook the lovers of Urdu poetry which is replete with the praises of wine and woman. Bachchan presented the 'Pyala' (cup) of wine in the symbol of 'Hala' which means poison. In one of the poems the poet said, "The two ages of poison are separated / by an imaginative line of wine." In a way the volume proved a reaction against the stereotyped theme of wine in Urdu poetry. For Bachchan the bitterness and ironies of life

are no less intoxicant than the wine. Such harsh realities seem as poison which the mankind dreads to face. As Urdu poetry celebrates wine in symbol, Bachchan sang the poison of harsh life in symbol :

Wine is a dream
That fills the world with mirth
No one dares touch the poison
The bitter truth of life !

* * *

If salvation is the aim of life
I found it in wine
I found it too
In the drops of poison ! (*Halahal*)

Halahal was followed with the publication of *Bangal Ka Kaal* (1946), *Soot Ki Mala* (1948), *Khadi Ke Phool* (1948) and *Milan Yamini* (1950).

In 1952, Bachchan went to Cambridge to do doctorate on the Irish poet, W.B. Yeats. His thesis was "W.B. Yeats and Occultism". He also lived with Yeats in Ireland and studied the poet's personality and his works from close quarters. He returned home with doctorate degree in 1954 and resumed teaching at Allahabad University. Next year he published *Pranay Patrika* (1955) that followed *Sopan* which he had published in 1953. He was appointed this year as Producer at the All India Radio, Allahabad which he gave up after three months to join the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Officer on Special Duty. He continued in this job till his retirement. For his outstanding contribution to literature he was nominated to Rajya Sabha in 1966, the year he retired from Foreign Affairs Ministry.

Pre-eminently a lyricist, Bachchan also experimented with form and chose a wide variety of themes in poetry. In *Bangal Ka Kaal* written in sympathy with the victims of the great famine of Bengal; he used free verse. In *Dhar Ke Idhar Udhar* (1957), he drew upon contemporary themes and wrote on national heroes and festivals and even the birthdays. Partly autobiographical, *Aarti Aur Angarey* (1958) also contains euologies to the great classical poets of Sanskrit, Persian and English languages. In *Buddh Aur Naach Ghar* (1958) which he wrote mostly in Ireland, the poet used free verse. In it he leashes his wrath on the dishonest friends. He

experimented with folk music and themes in *Tribhangima* (1961) though failed to reconcile the folk dialect with Khariboli. As in *Chaar Kheme: Chausanth Khoontey* (1962) he attacked ruthlessly the loss of values and ostentations of the new generation in *Do Chattaney* (1965). Almost similar themes are treated in the successive volumes; *Bahut Din Beetey* (1967), *Katati Pratimaon Ki Aawaaz* (1967), *Ubhartey Pratimaon Ke Roop* (1968) and *Jaal Sameta* (1973). He strikes occasionally a sympathetic note on the plight of the poets: "Poetry did not too give me bread / but thank god / it did not starve me either." (*Katati Pratimaon Ki Aawaaz*). One gets a glimpse of Bachchan's poetic development in one cover in his latest work *Nai Se Nai Purani Se Purani* (1985) which also elicits his views on earlier and contemporary poetry. He did not publish any work after 1985.

Bachchan's poetic talents are as best in translations as in his original writings. Beginning with Khayyam's *Madhushala* in 1932, his translations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1957), *Othello* (1959), *Hamlet* (1969) and *King Lear* (1972) were widely acclaimed by Hindi world. He translated hundred and one poems of W.B. Yeats: *Markat Dweep Ka Swar* (1965) and a number of Russian poems; *Chausanth Roosi Kavitayen* (1964). He translated *Gita* for common men as *Nagar Gita* (1966). His autobiography was published in four volumes: *Kya Bhooloon Kya Yaad Karoon* (1969), *Need Ka Nirman Phir* (1970), *Basere Se Door* (1977) and *Dashdwar Se Sopan Tak* (1985). The last volume was awarded the presitigious Saraswati Award in 1992. The poet was earlier bestowed Sahitya Akademi award in 1964.

Bachchan's popularity owes a great deal to his sonorous voice and the tradition of poetry meets (Kavi Sammelans) in Hindi belt. He participated in no less than five hundred meets. He began to write as early as 1920 when he was just thirteen and experimented a little while later with free verse under the influence of the poems published in the journal, "Matwala". It marks his dynamic approach to the form since few poets in Hindi then tried their hands in free verse. By 1930s he emerged quite a celebrity. In 1933 when he recited his poems in a poetry meet held at Banaras Hindu University, the audience was so charmed that they demanded to hear the poet again and again. To overcome the dilemma the organisers had to promise to hold an exclusive recital of the young poet the next day. The promise was fulfilled and much satisfied the poetry lovers.

The rubai form of poetry that Bachchan then wrote and recited was considered to be the exclusive preserve of Urdu poetry. The

people were thrilled at the orilliance, talent and skill of Bachchan who used the nuance, texture and brevity of Urdu poetry in Hindi. These poems animated with an Epicurian credo and a lyric of personal effusion were later anthologised in *Madhushala* (1935). In the symbols of wine and tavern he ridiculed the Hindus and Muslims squablling over the places of worship. A sample:

"Hindus and Muslims may differ in races
But the cup of wine is same.
They have no different taverns or wines
They sit together and drink

They visit their mosques and temples
Only when aware of differences.
Mosques and temples create that awareness
But the tavern brings them closer."

(*Madhushala*)

Around 1940s, Bachchan stood between romanticism and the new poetry and his writing was hailed as Halavadi poetry by which he is known down this day though he has been writing in the trend of each successive movement in Hindi poetry. But never again he revealed his earlier metrical genius in these works.

Hence from 1930 to 1992, Bachchan has written well over sixty years and represented more or less each movement in Hindi poetry. But he stands all alone with neither followers nor predecessors of any discernible stature. He did attract some youthful poets around sixties but none of them could make any mark. He is thus incomparable with any poet like Fitzgerald whose translation of *Rubaiyyat* made a lasting impression on his (Bachchan's) poetry. Despite his massive output of nearly fifty books to his credit his fame and place in Hindi poetry solely rests with *Madhushala* and *Halahal* reinforced by *Nisha Nimantran* and *Akul Antar*. But then he will also be remembered for promoting scores of new generation Hindi poets though they may have differed from his Halavadi influence.

Ramdhari Singh Dinkar

(1908–1974)

Dinkar epitomises progressive trend in Hindi poetry. His works on the whole mark a reaction against the romanticism. At a time when romanticism was at its height and Bachchan was writing in the Persian fashion on tavern and tavern-maid, Dinkar drew attention to suffering masses and gave call for action. Even as he was influenced by Marxism, his inspiration came not from Russia but from the toiling humanity of his own soil, the social inequality and the dominance of the rich landlords over the landless millions. It was also a period of country's slavery for which the poet's first concern was the freedom from the foreign yoke. He wished the people to be strong: "In the arteries of each soul / O God ignite thy

fire !" (Durbal prano ki nas-nas me Dev / phook do chingari). Poetry of his early period thus bore a vivid animation to stir up the masses against British rule. Even after independence the poet did not hesitate to attack the oppression of the down trodden by the new rulers.

In Hindi poetic history during early 1950 and 1970s, Dinkar was a forceful voice. We know it was also the period of such stalwarts as Pant, Nirala, Mahadevi Verma, Bachchan and Agyeya. Dinkar's audience was therefore divided. Yet the section of audience that valued his poetry mattered a great deal and in as much as he always sided with the people, throwing overboard the political patronage, he remained people's poet deep down his marrows. But then the author of *Kurukshetra* and *Hunkar* also wrote *Urvashi*.

Ramdhari Singh Dinkar was born on September 23, 1908 at Simaria in Munger district of Bihar. Simaria situated between the rivers Ganga and Baya is some thirtyfive kilometres east of Bajitpur where the poet Vidyapati died. His father, Ravi Singh was a poor farmer. He received his early education in a nationalist school and passed matriculation in 1928. Four years later he graduated from Patna University. For several months he roamed about unemployed till he managed a job of headmaster in a high school at a salary of Rs.55 per month. Since the school was run by the rich landlords, his functioning was frequently interfered in favour of upper classes. Eventually when the opportunity came he left it to join the government service in 1934 as sub-registrar. He remained in this job till 1943 during which period he wrote *Renuka, Hunkar, Rasvanti* and *Dwandgeet* and had commenced *Kurukshetra*. For his nationalistic leanings he suffered wrath of the government and was transferred twenty two times during five years. He was under strict surveillance. When the Second World War broke out he was transferred to the publicity department. After the war he remained on leave for about two years. During this period he set up a publication, Udyachal from where he published *Kurukshetra, Samdheni, Mitti Ki Or* and *Dhoop Chchanh*.

After independence Dinkar was amply rewarded for his nationalist contribution by the Congress government. He was promoted as the deputy director of publicity department and later appointed as professor in the post-graduate college at Muzzaffarpur. In 1952, he was elected to the Rajya Sabha. He led the Indian delegation to the world poetry meet at Warshaw (Poland) in 1955.

He was opted as Member of the Official Language Committee set up by the President in 1956 and was also in the Advisory Board of Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Sahitya Akademi. In 1959 he won the Sahitya Akademi award for his *Sanskriti Ke Chaar Adhyay;* the same year he was bestowed the Padam Bhushan by the government. He won the Jnanpith award in 1972. He was appointed the vice-chancellor of Bhagalpur university in 1965 which he left in 1970 to join Home Ministry as Advisor on Official Language. He died in Madras on 24th April 1974.

Tall and well-built, Dinkar had a handsome personality. He came from peasant stock and had the rugged vigour of peasantry. He had good memory but was short tempered though immensely charitable. His revolutionary credo was tempered and mellowed by the influence of Mahatma Gandhi to whom he looked for econo-political salvation of the country. He was ever in sympathy with the peasants and workers and wrote poignantly about them in the poems of *Hunkar,* especially in the poem "Chaah Ek" which moved Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India so deeply that he literally wept. The lines: "Get away from our path O clouds/ we come to plunder the heavens" became very famous with Hindi poetry lovers.

When Dinkar began to write, the nationalist fervour was at its height. Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement in 1921 had shaken the roots of British empire. Papers like "Yugantar" launched by Barindra Kumar Ghosh, "Kesari" of Balgangadhar Tilak, "Gadar" published in several Indian languages and even "Jahan-e-Islam" published from Constantinople had inspired millions of revolutionaries for country's independence. In 1924 a revolutionary paper, "Krantikari" was issued from Calcutta that stirred up the youths as far as Lahore. On the other hand Mahatma Gandhi's "Young India" was preparing people for non-violent course for freedom.

Dinkar was the product of this nationalist atmosphere in the country and in his works patriotism comes to fullest realisation. He strove to achieve through poetry what freedom-fighters were doing in active politics. In 1928, when he was twenty, Dinkar had written "Bordello Vijay" inspired by the triumph of peasants' agitation led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. In 1930 he wrote "Pran Bhang" pulsating in extreme nationalistic spirit. During this time the impact of Marxism was also making its way into art and literature of the country. Dinkar too came under its influence. But

much before he had been influenced by Maithili Sharan Gupta, especially his *Bharat Bharti* and *Jaydrath Badh*. He was deeply moved by an elegy written on the death of Lokmanya Tilak by "Ek Bhartiya Atma" published in "Pratap" from Kanpur in 1920. He later admitted that he was also influenced by Makhan Lal Chaturvedi, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan and other nationalist poets. In his first two works, *Renuka* (1935) and *Hunkar* (1938) he pleads in the spirit of the time for insurgent action and urges the people to shake off the centurian lethargy. There is need, he says, for Arjunas and not the Yudhishtaras and asks the people to demolish the decrepit values and religious orthodoxy. Calling to attention the poverty of the people he hits upon the false pride in the past that only led to the oppression of the poor masses by the rich and the privileged in perpetual succession:

> Obnoxious past, false pride in scriptures, deceptive logic
> Torturing the poor, weary, helpless people.
>
> *(Renuka)*

And in *Hunkar*, he says:

> I am the vigour of vigourless,
> The voice of age-old silence
> I am the burning song of the bruised, suppressed.

Such writings as these in prose and poetry came to be known as progressive works and Dinkar was emerging as the foremost progressive poet. The first conference of progressive writers was held in Lucknow presided by Munshi Premchand in 1936 while the second was presided by Rabindranath Tagore. Most renowned writers and thinkers thus had come under the banner of progressive trend. Sumitranandan Pant, the romantic bard had written *Yugvani* in 1940 which typifies the prevailing trend as the *Manav* of Bhagvati Charan Verma. Yet the authors guarded the essential soul in poetry and would not allow the invasion of dialectic materialism into it. Asked Dinkar, "Will the people of classless society be free from love and compassion, ambitions and passions, attachment and greed, the effects of beauty and spiritual thought?"

However the impact of romanticism in Hindi poetry was so deep and pervasive that even the poets like Dinkar could not come out of it all at once. In his earlier works he intermittently wrote under seductive influence of romanticism though the results were not far too satisfactory as in the poems of *Rasvanti* (1939) where the poet admits: "In these songs I have lost control over myself and in

lethargic passiveness I wandered behind the trail of that fairy called the imagination". These poems are sentimental, erotic and far often mystic. Almost similar poems characterise his subsequent, *Dwand Geet* (1940). It is however in *Saamdheni* (1946) that we notice after almost ten years, the distinctive force and vitality of the poet. Among others deserving special mention in this volume is the title poem where the poet achieves stimulating effect through allegories built purposefully. He asks the Purodha (priest—the poet) to lit fire of revolt in the Samidha (sacrificial wood— the poetry) of Yajna (the sacrifice) :

> The fire fails to catch in the Yajna
> Dismal directions, the impatient people !
> Is there any poet like Purodha
> Who can make missiles of revolt?

Such call of insurgency also constitutes the poems like "Aag Ki Bheekh", "Palegi Dhalon Me Talwar" and "Rahi ki Bansuri".

Dinkar developed during this period an interest for children's literature. He wrote limericks and doggerels full of rhythmical subtlety and also translated from other languages. These are included in *Dhoop Chchanh* (1946). In *Bapu* (1946) which was published in revised edition next year, the poet pays rich tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and finds in him divine attributes. Not much significant is his subsequent work *Itihas Ke Aansoo* (1948) which includes some of his poems published in earlier volumes written on the themes drawn from history.

In the meanwhile, people all along had looked to independence with great hopes but the violence that erupted the country and the frustration that it caused to the millions of already mauled-up souls, thoroughly disillusioned the poet. He wrote vigorously on the general despair of the people and their sufferance. In the poems of *Dhoop Aur Dhuan* (1950), especially "Swarg Ke Deepak" and "Swapno Ka Dhuan", the poet brings to focus how the golden dreams of the country's freedom were shattered by the lecherous avarice, selfishness and exploitation of the weak and helpless by the leaders in power. The contemptuous attack on the rulers of free nation reappears in the poems of *Delhi* (1956) succeeding *Neel Kusum* (1955) which was sadly repetitive and marked with pedestrian attempt to catch on the new trend of experimentalism. *Delhi* however contains four gripping poems on the theme of Delhi as the seat of power and politics being the capital town of the country. The poet comments on the pre- and post-independence

rulers and finds the either lot apathetic to people's welfare. The leaders who promised prosperity and happiness to the people during freedom struggle were now vying each other only to amass wealth. He attacks their double standard, callousness and indulgence in imported luxuries:

Come to senses O the lords of Delhi
The illusive days will not last for ever
Breaths of directions are hotting up
The soil will explode any time.

In other poems the poet mounts attack on pseudo-nationalism, hoarding and blackmarketeering. He doesn't spare even the Congress leaders some of whom reduced the tricolour flag and the national dress of Khadi to mere rags in their rapacious lust for riches. He employs bitter humour and sarcasm in these poems. On the occasion of anniversary celebration of the independence he rather asks: "Will you not celebrate in a few years/ the decade of black-marketeering with aplomb ?/There should be celebrations too/one after another/Of gains of deception, conceit and hypocrisy/And of course the conspiracies of politics."

Dinkar took respite from his revolutionary inspiration for some time as manifest in *Naye Subhasit* (1957) wherein he wrote on love, beauty and man-woman relationships. These poems are full of common-places. But he emerges forcefully in the poems of *Parasuram Ki Pratiksha* (waiting of Parasuram) which includes three poems from *Saamdheni*. The most powerful in the volume is the title poem, "Parasuram Ki Pratiksha" inspired by the Chinese attack on India in 1962. It is an allegorical poem based on the legendary sage Parasuram who is said to have brought the Brahmaputra river on earth that flows across north-east frontier area (NEFA), the region attacked by Chinese forces. The wrath of Parasuram is well-known in Indian mythology. The poem has been developed in five parts. The poet questions with scorn the cause of the fall which he argues is owing to the lethargic leaders whose blood had curdled and who to eye-wash the people preached for non-violence. The poet holds the self-centred leaders responsible for the annihilation of the brave soldiers and assures that the latter's sacrifice will not go in vain. The wounded nation is fired with a Parasuram-rage and is determined to take revenge. The fiery nation awaits united to strike the enemy any time.

Parasuram Ki Pratiksha evoked much interest among Hindi readers. In it the insurgent message of *Hunkar* appeared once again

with trenchant force. It was quite a different style, diction and theme of his verse that Dinkar was now writing which attracted a host of young poets to follow his trail. Dinkar was at once hailed as the foremost of Progressive poets as progressive writing came to be identified as the literature in sympathy with the working class. But Dinkar disappointed his admirers with his subsequent works, *Koyala Aur Kavitt* (1964) and *Atma Ki Aankhey* (1964) both of which strike dismal note suggesting a falling-off in the quality of his verse. While the poems of the former are mostly didactic, the latter contains translations, some of which had been earlier published in *Seepi Aur Shankh*. These poems are largely mystic. A few draw from Marxism. In *Mriti Tilak* (1964) he praises the concepts of Panchasheel and the principle of peaceful co-existence. He also eulogises the Russian leaders who visited the country. There is an implicit attempt to justify the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Dinkar's three great works of later period are: *Kurukshetra* (1946) *'Rashmi Rathi* (1952) and *Urvashi* (1961) whose themes are drawn from *Mahabharata*. In *Kurukshetra* he deals with the remorse and despondency of Yudhisthira at the end of the historic battle which echoes the vaccilation of Arjuna before the epic battle. Even after victory Yudhisthira suffers from a tragic sense of desolation and doesn't wish to rule the conquered kingdom. He rather decides to abandon the kingship and go to the forests for penance and salvation. To resolve his dilemma he seeks interview with Bhishm Pitamah who lies ailing on his death bed. The latter dissuades Yudhisthira from his retrograde sentiments and exhorts him to be optimistic. He assures him that the earth will one day be free from all battles and be full of love, justice and humanity. Man's glory will be judged by his sacrifice and compassion for others. *Kurukshetra* is highly introspective and brings to bear the mental conflicts of Yudhisthira very powerfully seeking to reevaluate the traditional ethos and interpret the present problems of war and peace through the story of *Mahabharata*.

Dinkar reinstates Karna, the neglected character of *Mahabharata* as the paragon of ideals and supreme bravery in *Rashmi Rathi*. Portraying the legendary progeny of Sun God, he proves how Karna was more sinned than sinning. He presents his protagonist quite in rational perspective and focuses upon Karna's unflinching charity, his spiritual sufferance, bravery and the virtue of gratitude that remains unshaken on the face of irresistible temptations. He refuses to change the side even when he learns

that the enemies he is fighting for are his own brothers. It is for such virtues that Karna is adored by Indians as the Daan Veer Karna. Dinkar's reputation as a poet shot up after *Rashmi Rathi*. He was now considered as one of the great Hindi poets. The successive poets of Dinkar who wrote on Karna, were influenced by *Rashmi Rathi*.

In perspective of poetic sensibility of Dinkar, *Kurukshetra* and *Rashmi Rathi* are quite characteristic of the poet. In vigour and virulence, the diction flaming with exciting action and the message of revolt, the two works are fruition of the themes handled earlier and the craftsmanship and style of the poet developed for nearly three decades. But Dinkar surprised the Hindi world with his unpredictable *Urvashi* (1961), a highly erotic work in which sex and psychology are given an unorthodox interpretation. The poet glorifies free sex and uses the scriptural sources to validate his view. The sacrosanct sexual morals are shown in lighter esteem while repressible behaviour is exalted. The work introduced quite a new dimension of the poet and intrigued the Hindi world resulting in outrageous controversy.

Urvashi is a verse play on the theme of mythic king Pururuva and Urvashi, one of the three chief courtesans of the kingdom of heavens; the other two being Menaka and Rambha. Urvashi fell from divine grace when she showed weakness for a mortal (Pururuva) during her performance. She was cursed by sage Bharata. When she implored for forgiveness, the curse was attenuated. She was however to undergo the earthly life, marry a mortal and bear him a child. She would be free from the blight, the sage Bharata upheld, soon she would unite with her separated son. As a consequence she descends from heaven and tempts king Pururuva of Prathisthanpur who marries her according to Gandharva rites. She gives birth to a son, Aayu who is raised in the forest by Sukanya, the wife of sage Chyavan. The king passionately loves Urvashi and cannot bear separation from her for a moment:

> I kiss the grass, water, flowers and leaves
> I embrace all objects and the vines
> Like a child I hide my face in your bosom
> And sink in the silence of deep slumber.

The king's head-queen, Aushinari is however upset at this diversion and curses herself for not being able to satiate the urges of her husband as does the heavenly Urvashi. Even as she decries the

treatment of women in the man-dominated society she finally comes to terms with herself and admits :

> But man wishes ever to taste
> Newer moments of honey
> And kisses everytime
> A new flower soaked in dews.

On the other hand Sukanya who rears the child for fourteen years cannot any longer afford to see him separated from parents. She brings the child to the court of King Pururuva. Father and son unite and so joins the mother. Thereupon Urvashi vanishes into air.

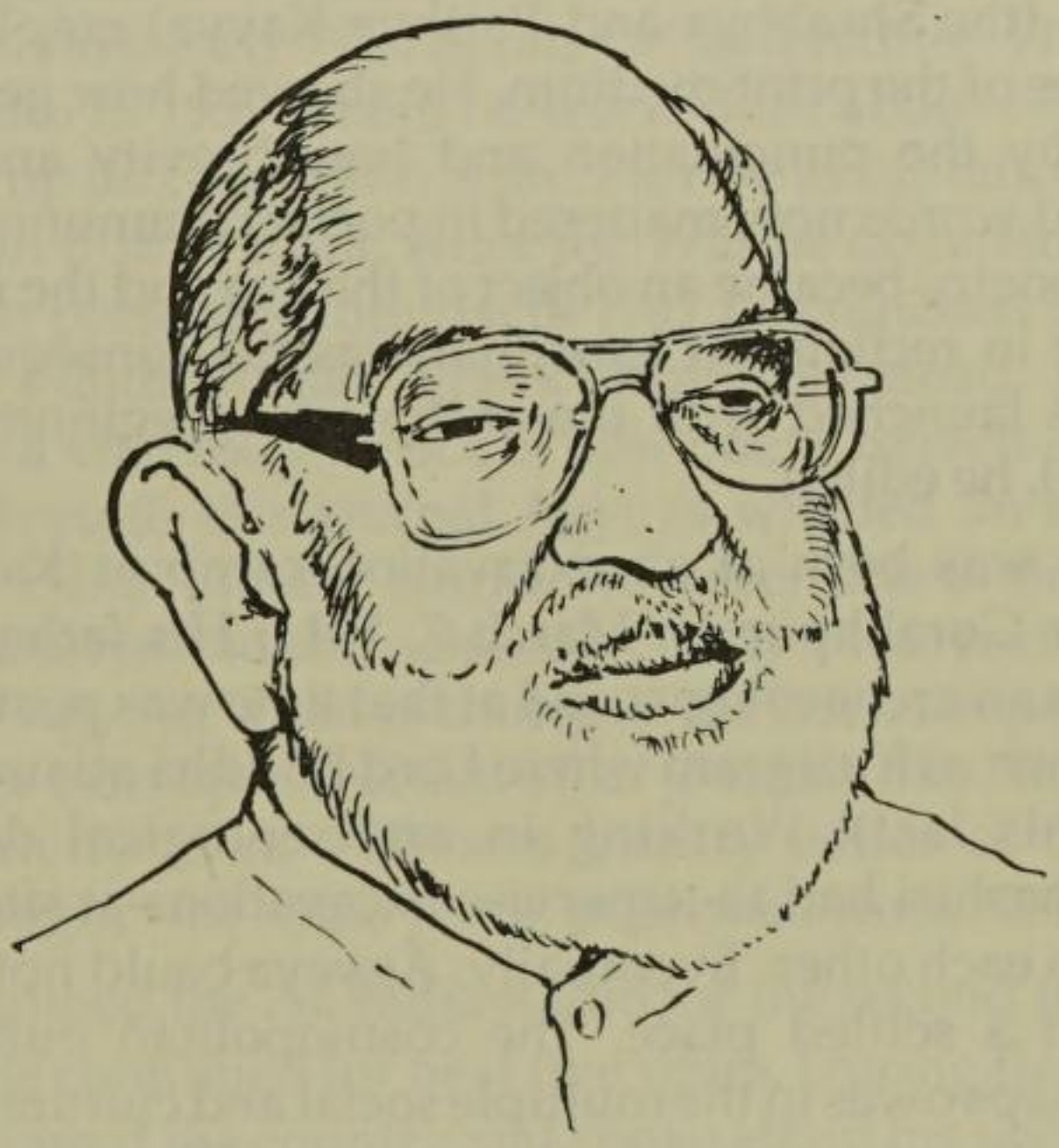
Dinkar used the legend of Urvashi from his wide range of reading. The legend first figures sketchily in *Rig Veda.* It is recounted in *Mahabharata* and *Shatpath Brahmana* wherein we learn Pururuva was born of Ila, the daughter of Manu. Among other sources it is found in *Manu Smriti, Shrimad Bhagvata, Puranas* and the Buddhist sources. Kalidas, the Sanskrit playwright used the episode for his *Vikramorvashi.* Dinkar drew his theme from all these sources and for large part at certain places from Kalidas.

Urvashi is an allegorical work where Pururuva represents the eternal man and Urvashi the eternal woman. The allegorical scheme has however far lesser dimension and complexity with that of *Kamayani* though parallels have been drawn of both. It is written in five acts and strictly follows the classical rules of dramaturgy. The metaphysical deliberations and the style of the diction echo an obvious impact of *Kamayani* though it doesn't lessen the value of Dinkar's work.

Dinkar's last work was *Hare Ko Hariram* (1971) which is meditative and partly allegorical. The poet withdraws inward and comments on soul, body and the mind and their interaction with the external universe. There is a note of melancholic despair. In most poems the poet tends to be spiritual. In his last days the poet seriously wished to renounce the worldly life and be a hermit though he dissuaded himself from such step for his heavy family responsibilities. For the Hindi world the author of *Urvashi* would ever remain the bard of youth and insurgency. So said he calling the youth to make history:

> All make efforts to reach the top
> But there is one in millions
> Who dies only when he reaches the top.

Sachchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan- "Agyeya"



(1911–1987)

No poet in twentieth century Hindi poetry so consciously strived to stir up a movement as did Sachchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan, popularly known by his pseudonym, Agyeya. His advent in Hindi poetry coincided with the decay of Romanticism. Hindi poetry from 1936 to 1955 centred around Bachchan and Dinkar. But Bachchan's "Halavadi" poetry (allusive celebration of wine) did not succeed to create any noticeable followers and Dinkar's progressive and nationalistic writing was worth in as much as his own poetry was concerned. Both Bachchan and Dinkar remained

solitary towers and had a limited following. This was more or less the scenario during late forties.

Also, the Hindi readers who were by now increasingly well educated were impressed by the poetic and art trends in the west. They read the western works in original, notably in English and did not have to wait till they percolated through Bengali literature as had been the case during Romantic period. For large part, English and American poetry was better communicated in print than through recitals. With this influence Hindi poetry whose primary audience was in recitals now took a historic turn. Agyeya exploited this new development to his advantage to which his talent was most suited. He wrote at length on the poetry of reading and recitals (the Shrabbya and Patthya Kavya) emphasising the potentialities of the print medium. He showed how gestures were succeeded by the punctuation and how brevity and stress on syllables and words now mattered in poetic communication. With him Hindi poetry became an object of the eye and the mind rather than the ear in recitals. At least that was the consequence of his experiments launched with the anthologies beginning with *Tar Saptak* (1943), he edited.

Agyeya was born at an excavation camp at Kasia, district Deoria, near Gorakhpur on March 7, 1911. His father Hiranand Shashtri was an archaeologist and at that time was posted at Kasia. Kasia is known as Kusigram where Lord Buddha attained Nirvana (breathed his last). Working in archaeological department, Hiranand Shashtri had to supervise excavations at sites distantly located from each other. Eventually, Agyeya could not receive his education at a settled place. The cosmopolitan outlook in his writing perhaps owes to the multiple social and cultural influences he drew at different places in the country. His early education, almost oral, was in Sanskrit at Lucknow. He then moved to Shrinagar and to Jammu where he studied Persian and English in addition to Sanskrit. He passed matriculation from Punjab University in 1925 and Intermediate from Madras University in 1927. For bachelor in science degree he studied at Lahore and took the degree from Punjab University in 1929 in first division. By now he seems to have lost interest in science subject for he took admission in English literature for post-graduation.

Even before Agyeya could complete his M.A., he came in contact with the revolutionaries and gave up his studies plunging

all hog into freedom movement. He was one of those activists who strove to free Bhagat Singh from prison in 1930. It is said the revolutionaries were setting up a bomb manufacturing factory at Delhi under the guise of Delhi-Himalayan-Toilet factory. Agyeya was the scientific adviser of this factory. A plan had been also drawn to set up a similar factory at Amritsar. The schemes however failed due to leakage and on November 15, 1930 Agyeya along with other revolutionaries was arrested. He was intermittently imprisoned for about four years after being implicated in several cases.

After his release, Agyeya resolved to get into some jobs and secured employment in the editorial of "Sainik" in 1936 which he left next year and joined "Vishal Bharat" as its editor. He moved to All India Radio in 1939 where he worked for about two years. In 1943 he gave up this too to join army. He rose as captain in the army and fought on Burma front. After the War he obtained discharge from army on personal grounds. In 1947 he launched publication of a monthly Hindi journal "Pratik" from Allahabad. The journal proved quite a vital mouthpiece of new poetic movement Agyeya stood for. Through this journal Agyeya wielded an exceptional influence on Hindi literary world. However due to financial difficulties the journal had to be closed in 1952. It was revived during later years of Agyeya when of course it had lost its impact. Agyeya also edited for brief spells certain other journals like "Bijli" and the English quarterly "Vak". He was literary editor of the English weekly "Thought" for some years, published from New Delhi.

Agyeya joined the All India Radio for the second time in 1950 with which he continued for next five years. During this period he extensively toured the country and spoke about his poetic theories at several literary meets. In 1955 he visited west Europe on invitation from UNESCO and later to the east Asian countries. He again visited Europe in 1960. Next year he was appointed professor of Indian culture and literature at the University of California. Around this time he visited a host of Slavic countries. His official residence during this while was intermittently at Allahabad and New Delhi (Allahabad—1947-50, New Delhi—1950-1955, Allahabad—1957-58, New Delhi — 1958—till his death).

In 1965 Agyeya was appointed the editor of Hindi weekly, "Dinman". With his wide experience and imaginative gift as also his scholarship, Agyeya made "Dinman" a serious periodical on

politics, art and literature. Few Hindi papers were hen taken seriously for their comments. "Dinman" thus filled a void. Here again Agyeya proved an outstanding journalist. He however gave up this job after some time and joined Jodhpur Univ as the director of Indian languages. But this too turned out to be a brief diversion of the poet. He soon returned to New Delhi and devoted to whole-time writing. After the Janata Government was voted to power in 1978, he was appointed the editor of "Nav Bharat Times", a Hindi daily. He however made no significant contribution to the daily and left it in 1980 when the Congress Government came into power.

Of all Hindi poets of his generation, Agyeya was the most fortunate. He had the opportunity to work with a host of journals and enjoyed facilities to extensively tour at home and abroad. He was greatly fond of travelling and in this urge he is oftenly compared with Rahul Sanskratayan, a great Hindi scholar and writer. He enjoyed the largest following through whose writings he was widely popularised and acclaimed. He died issueless in New Delhi on April 4, 1987. He won Sahitya Akademi (1964) and Jnanpith (1978) awards and was considered a messiah of Hindi poetry during his life time. His personal life was some sort different from other Hindi poets though some Hindi authors too did likewise as if following his footsteps. He was married to Santosh in 1940. Santosh is the sister of the Hindi author late Satyavati Malik who made immense contribution to Delhi's cultural and educational promotion. It was a civil marriage which broke within a month in August, 1940. Agyeya was legally divorced from her in 1946. Santosh later married the famous Hindi film-star, Balraj Sahni, brother of renowned Hindi author Bhisma Sahani. During his second stint with All India Radio, Agyeya came in contact with Kapila Malik, daughter of Satyavati Malik and neice of Santosh. He married Kapila on July 7, 1956 which too ended later in separation. From around seventies he lived with Ila Dalmia, a pretty woman, well educated and cultured belonging to business magnate Dalmia family. She was his consort till death. Agyeya was of handsome personality and good physique. He was of fair complexion quite different from usual Indian complexions. He spoke softly and radiated a charm that attracted women even in his old age.

Agyeya's eminence in Hindi was recognised mainly on account of his historic "Saptak" anthologies through which he introduced a host of poets for wider readership even if they did not

share a homogenous poetic credo each other and even if they differed with Agyeya's own poetic faith. His position in poetry was further strengthened with his experimental novels: *Shekhar Ek Jivani* (Part I--1941, Part II--1944), *Nadi Ke Dweep* (1952) and *Apney Apney Ajnavi* (1961); all of which hit headlines in Hindi literary journals.

Agyeya's early works *Bhagna Doot* (1933) and *Chinta* (1942) display his youthful passions, sensuousness and a deep influence of Prasad and Nirala. This is characteristic even in the poems of *Ityalam* (1946). In his poetic perception, imagination and language, Agyeya inherited in fact a legacy from the Romanticists from which he never freed himself despite his revolt against poetic idiom, imageries, symbols and myths of the past. The poems of *Bhagna Doot* are divided into four parts; dream of a prisoner, heart like a blue bird (haril), castles of restrictions (vanchana) and the feeling of the soil (iha). In the first section the poet describes the life of a prisoner, contemporary revolutionary movements, patriotism and the unsuccessful love. Poems of the second part echo his experienc- in love besides the personal mysticism (inward quest). The poet declares the blue bird, haril, as the symbol of his own self. Third section contains experimental and satirical pieces. Some of the poems of this section are included in the first section of *Tar Saptak*. The fourth section contains poems on seasons and the experience of love.

Poems of *Chinta* were written in prison where he also wrote most part of the novel, *Shekhar Ek Jivani*. These poems display an influence of D.H. Lawrence. The poems are divided into two parts: the first concerning men while second the women and titles as "Viswapriya" and "Ekayan". In the first section the poet describes four dimensions of man-woman love while in the second the self-surrender of the woman, shedding her ego that obstructed the union. The poet believes, in such union in universal context, lies the eternal love between man and woman. *Ityalam* with a poem under that title also contains the poems of *Bhagna Doot*. The poet addresses his imaginative lover in the manner of Romantic poets: "Even dust under your feet is gay, my heart/ I am in your thought" (Pran tumhari pad raj phooli/Main tumharey dhyan Me Hun) or "Today my heart like blue bird, is tired" (Aaj thaka hiya haril mera). In a way, *Ityalam* has historical importance since it is here that the poet for the first time announces his pseudonym: "He was un-

knowable, he called himself unknowable/He became wise and therefore remained unknowable" (Raha agyeya, nij ko kaha ageya/Hua vigya, so raha ageya).

Thus in all the poems of early three collections, the poet is chiefly concerned with love and nature. He allows his imagination to wander aloft the pleasant garden of poetic phrases. He enjoys in an undefined sensation of metaphor which crystallises his experience. These volumes mark the formative stage of the poet wherein he seems assimilating his experiences and expanding his poetic horizon. In *Ityalam* he says : "I am assimilating the pain of entire universe/because I am the poet of life".

In the meanwhile the poet had edited the famous *Tar Saptak* (1943) anthology containing poems by seven poets, all of whom became the distinguished authors in subsequent years. Poems of this volume exerted a definite influence in the development of Nai Kavita (new poetry) and Nav Geet (new songs). It contained the poems of Muktivodh, Girija Kumar Mathur, Prabhakar Machwe, Ram Vilas Sharma and others including Agyeya himself. In this anthology, Agyeya also declared the mission of experiments with form and exploration of newer realities. He said similes, symbols and imageries in Hindi had become outdated with repeated use and there was now need to search for the new to bring in freshness. It was also here that he announced about his credo. "I do not write for self-pleasure," he said, "that any poet ever writes merely for self-pleasure, I am unable to accept". Agyeya edited in subsequent years three more Saptak anthologies (poems by seven poets); *Dusra Saptak* in 1951, *Teesra Saptak* in 1959 and the *Chautha Saptak* in 1976. In course of time it became a prestige for every Hindi poet to be included in the *Saptak* anthologies. By now he had also popularised his poetic thoughts through essays compiled in the volume *Trisanku* (1943) wherein his ideas seem to be deeply influenced by T.S. Eliot.

Thus by 1946, Agyeya was not only heard but was also taken seriously. His experimental tendency comes in bolder relief in the next volume, *Hari Ghas Par Ek Chchan* (1949). With this the poet takes a turn from the idiom of Romanticism. He sheds his earlier sentimentalism. There is impressionistic subtlety and freshness in rhetoric. The much talked-about poems such as "Kalgi Bajrey ki", "Chchand hai yah phool", "Nadi ke Dweep" and the "Pawas-Prat"

are contained in this volume. Of significant note is the poet's seriousness in self-exploration and experiments. The poet had asserted earlier that the contemporary poets were explorers of new paths and for that matter were the experimentalists. But when the critics avered that it was the advent of experimentalism in Hindi poetry, Agyeya at once protested. He insisted that experiment has no 'ism' and therefore it was a misnomer. Giving his specific view about poetry he said, "Poetry is not the objective, within itself." He said poetic content and poetic subject are altogether different things. Subjects may be new but not the content, he added. If Agyeya meant values by content, it was easy to agree with him. But he remains obscure for his insistence that content is eternal. All the same, there is definitely something new in his experiments as may be seen in the title poem:

Whether you speak
even if slowly
In humming soliloquy
Or be quiet----
Be natural: Do not pride
But bend like the tamed flood
Be open and meet without inhibition
Smiling within, restraining within
Like the green grass.

("Hari Ghas Par Chchan Bhar")

"Hari Ghas Par Chchan Bhar" (A moment on green grass) is considered a highly allegorical poem of the poet. It is the allegory of the liberation of the soul and surrender. There are hints to free-sex in the poem too.

Agyeya uses the allegory of the Sun in the title poem of *Babra Aheri* (Hunter of the East) published in 1954. The poet urges the Sun to dispel darkness of his doubts, uncertainties, despair and angst. In a poem "Shodak Bhaya" he satirises the explorers though with affection and sympathy. The poems, "Jharne ke Liye Chandni jee lo" and "Vigyapti" manifest his positivism. He tends to folk music in the poems like "Kangrey ki Chchoriya" and "Jharney Ke Liye". His fond love for silence recurs in the poem, "Aaj tum Shabd na do" like the loneliness in "Yah Deep Akela" wherein the lamp burns lonely but with pride. In all his expression the poet is conscious of retaining something yet unexpressed. He is happy for

it since he doesn't wish to lose intensity of experience through expression.

Indra Dhanu Roundey Huye Ye (The Crushed Rainbow) which contains fiftyeight poems written during 1954 and 1955 is a major work in the second phase of development of the poet. The poet implores blessings of the God in the preface of the volume published in 1957. Significance of the volume assumes from the point of consummation of the poet rather than anything new in it. There is provoking thought as well as a spirit of self-submission in some poems. The long poem, "Itihas Ki Hava" (The Wind of History) presents the socio-political and cultural ironies from the legendary past down to our own age wielded through an integral myth. The poet quite powerfully succeeds in invention of symbols and imageries in the poems, "Itihas Chetana" (History Consciousness), "Mahanagar Raat" (Metropolis Night), and "Hawai Yatra : Oonchi Udan" (Air Travel: High Flight). There is a scathing satire on the critics of experimental poetry.

Most poems of *Aree O Karuna Prabhamay* (O The Glowing Compassion) published in 1959 are symbolic. Different aspects of nature appear in symbolic form of thoughts and emotions. Through these symbols the poet also seeks to express despair and frustration of consumerist society. Symbols of sexual repression are presented in psychological context:

> Evening. Fading horizon.
> Heart's wave breaking into pieces.
> Dark shadows hovering.
>
> ("Aree O Karuna Prabhamay")

Mostly on contemporary themes, the poems of this volume are divided into four parts: Roopyitri, Roop-Keki, Ek-Chand Ka Khaka and Dwarheen Dwar. The idiom of new poetry is discernible in the first part which is comical in spirit and portrays the self-experience of the poet. The poet uses intricate allegory to express his observation of life and nature in the second part. The third part comprises translation of some Haiku poems from Japanese which the poet read in English version. The fourth part reveals the poet in his mystic exploration. There are again the satiric poems in which Agyęya is caustically bitter in attacking social, political and industrial paradoxes in the country. The volume thus highlights Agyeya's growing concern with experiments and mysticism.

The much acclaimed book, *Aangan Ke Par Dwar* (Door Beyond the Court Yard) published in 1961 contains poems written during 1959-61. Here the poet tends to be a spiritual sage. The volume is in three parts: Antah Salila (inner stream), Chakrant Shila (Rock Beyond Wheel) and Asadhya Veena (Unattainable Lyre). The poet makes ontological studies and seeks to express them through symbols and imageries. The influence of Buddhism, and Upanishadic studies are evident in most poems. His major themes are soul, god, existence and the quest beyond death. The poet seeks tangible in the intangible and extra-elemental love in the unloveable. To him soul ultimately merges with eternal sphere and therefore he urges:

> Go ! Thou soul go
> The eternal sphere is thy path
> Thy aim, food, water, nutrition,
> Lord, right and religion:

In "Asadhya Veena" the poet creates an atmosphere of Buddha period and gives a long discourse on the unity of man's outer and inner worlds. The poems depict an essence of Agyeya's reading in different religions and philosophies.

The poetic consciousness of Agyeya reaches its height in *Kitni Naawon Me Kitni Bar* (How many times in how many boats) published in 1966. The poet appears to have attained a vision in the course of his search for reality. But then he abstracts his intense experience and quite often takes recourse to symbols to express his discovered truth:

> We are Yagya
> And the performers of Yagya
> We are offerings
> And the recipient of offerings.
> O my unfulfilled, ever blazing fire,
> My priest ! O the grain of my offering!
> Come, eat me
> As I devoured you like the egad.

In some poems the poet is at once mystic and realist. Truth is bitter while lie is darkness, an illusion. The poet's ambiguity is striking when he comments on their relationship: "The naked, bitter, heartless light / All the more exposes/ The naked darkness." Artistically, the poet finds a new dimension of linguistic possibility. Love

for him continues to be a great treasure of mankind, difficult to find and yet much difficult to preserve: "Keep only that carefully / Whichever dies/Only the glow of love." His all embracing love for humanity are found in the poems, "O Nissang Mametar", "Mahanagar Kuhra", "Krounch Ke Peechchey" and "Machchalia". *Kitni Naawon Me Kitni Bar* was awarded Jnanpith Award in 1978, then the highest literary honour in the country.

Agyeya's reflexes of social thoughts and the psychological probings on human values are found in the collection, *Kyonki Mai Usey Janta Hun* published in 1969. Man and mankind are two central themes of this volume which is divided in two parts: Gunjegi Awaj and Prathna Ka Ek Prakar. Once again we find the poet's pre-occupation with silence: "In such incontrovable silences/ One finds trifle immortalities here and there/ Among whom I may breathe to live" ("Sagar Mudra"). The poem "Sagar Mudra" (No. 1, 2, 3) first appeared in this volume which later comprised the major part of the collection under the title, *Sagar Mudra* (1971) wherein there are eleven poems under that title. The poems are allegorical, mystic and concerned with existentialism. The poet deals with life, death, time and consciousness. The ocean (sagar) is the symbol of all these and Brahma which is the origin of the origin in whom merges the time. The poet feels they are fortunate who live in the past and future. But they who wrestle with the present neither belong to past nor future. They exist in fearful uncertainties. The poet again echoes Kabir and other mystics like in *Angan Ke Par Dwar*, when he seeks to discover the 'door' through which he may achieve salvation. He feels 'fear' is that 'door' through which he may reach the Absolute. In the "Nanda Devi" section of this volume there are some fifteen poems related to Nanda Devi, one of the highest peaks of Himalaya (more than fifteen thousand feet high). Celebrating the natural bounties of the Nanda Devi the poet gives expression to his own experience and comments on the destructive forces of modern civilisation.

Agyeya attached uncommon importance to the brevity in expression which reflected in his poems of *Maha Braksha Ke Neechey* wherein he comments on ironies of life through images. His life-long love for silence again surfaces in the poems of *Pahaley Main Sannata Bunta Hun* (1976) of which title a poem had earlier appeared in *Sagar Mudra*. The poet in these poems takes up the issues of life, death and existence. In the web of silence, he feels, a part of his own self is caught, but he is not entrapped in the web. Soon he

recognises himself, he finds himself outside it. The influence of Kabir is manifest in the poems. But whereas Kabir used concrete symbols, Agyeya choses their abstraction. Myths, imagery and allegory are once again dominant and the poet tends towards mysticism as earlier. He once again seeks to merge his own consciousness with that of the time. "Hara Andhakar" is a powerful poem of the volume. The poet added three more poems to the volume under the title of "Sagar Mudra". The poems "Koi Hai Jo" and "Khuley Me Khada Ped" are commentary on existentialism and the contemporary life.

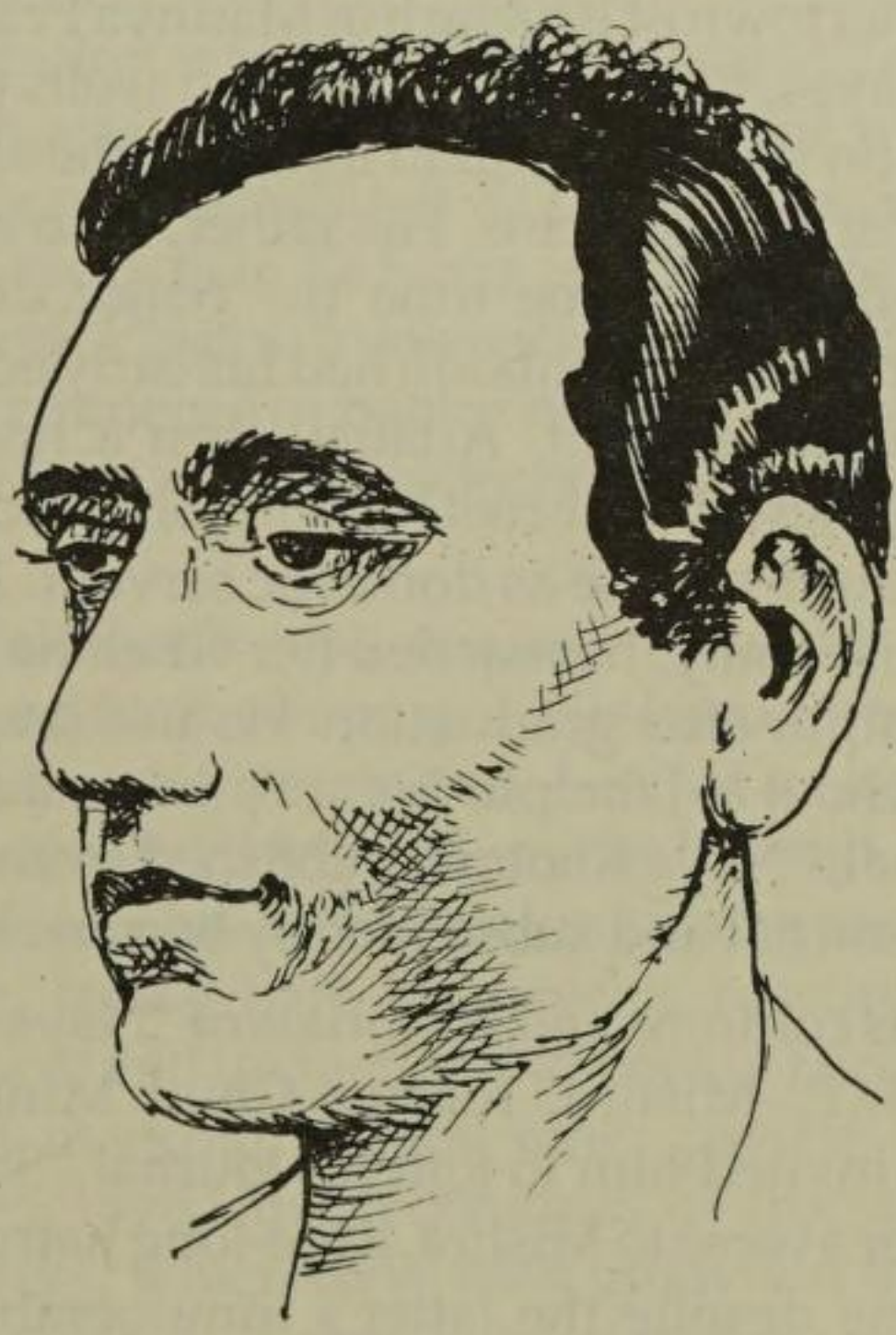
Agyeya's poems from beginning till 1950 were anthologised in a monumental single volume *Poorva* published in 1965. In yet another collection, *Sunahaley Shaival* (1966), some fortyfour poems were republished with illustrative photographs; some poems being from *Poorva*. His second volume of essays on different aspects of literature and culture *Atmaneypad* was published in 1960. This was followed by a number of essay collections among which were: *Hindi Sahitya: Ek Adhunik Paridrashya, Sab Rang Aur Kuchch Raag, Bhavanti, Likhi Kagat Korey, Jog Likhi, Adyatan Antara, Aalvaal* and *Samvatsar*. Agyeya enumerated his creative experiences in *Bhavanti* (1972, second ed. 1975) which sheds ample light on his later poetry like *Antara*.

Agyeya's critical writings are helpful to know his poetic philosophy and the experimental and new poetic trends in Hindi. These however do not secure him any position as literary critic. He was pre-eminently a poet and a novelist and through both the genres he created a stir in Hindi literature. He however also wrote short stories which for his chaste Hindi did not become as popular as that of Premchand or Manto (in Urdu). Collections in which these stories appeared included; *Vipathga* (1937), *Parampara* (1944), *Kothri Ki Baat* (1945), *Sarnarthi* (1949), *Jayadol* (1951), *Ye Tere Roop* and *Prtiroop* (1961). He also wrote dance drama, *Uttar Priyadarshi* (1967) and travelogues: *Arey Yayavar Yad Rahega* (1953) and *Ek Boond Sahasa Uchchali* (1960). He was among the few authors in Hindi who had equally good command in English as is evident in his translation of Jainendra Kumar's *Tyagpatra* (1944) and Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Shrikant* (1946).

Of all poets in Hindi, Agyeya was the most individualistic. In *Bhavanti* he said that as a poet he always felt lonely. His loneliness was not a choice but compulsion even as he made conscious effort

to keep a rapport between the reader and poet. His insistent urge for silence is correlated with his loneliness. He felt the poets express best not by words but by the silence within the words: "Poetry is not in language, it is also not in words, it is amid the silences between the words." (*Aalval*). To him, the poets extend the meanings not by using words but by not using them. He said in *Indra Dhanu Roundey Ye*, "Silence is also expression/ Say only as much/ As your truth". He lent importance not to the intensity of feelings but the process of creation. In the process of creation, the accumulation of feelings and the experience give birth to a tension which gradually expands in the process of sufferance. Agyeya's stress on 'Sufferance' is similar to the view of Auden who speaking to Stephen Spender said the latter could write poetry, because, "you (Spender) are so infinitely capable of being humiliated. Art is born of humiliation." Agyeya also came close to Spender when he said, "the reality of poetry is not the reality of material world." In his *World Within World* Spender regretted "My poems were all attempts to record, as truthfully as I could, experiences which, within reality, seemed to be poetry". And he went on to explain, "...the poem developed according to verbal needs of its own which had no relation to experience." Thus Agyeya showed not only his awareness with the contemporary western writing but also reinterpreted it in light of oriental poetic philosophy. And hence not without a solid artistic and academic background and practice he reigned supreme for nearly quarter century in our age in Hindi poetry.

Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh



(1917–1964)

The critical compliments that have been showered on Muktibodh since his death in 1964 at least points to the fact that he was no ordinary genius set aside during his lifetime. But that is the fate he met with, writing ceaselessly under gnawing poverty and the apathy of the highbrow class. He is sometimes equated with Nirala who was almost his contemporary. Both held their pride above their needs and refused to compromise their ideals at all costs. Both chose to write in free verse. Both wrote more for the toiling masses than for armchair readers. Yet Muktibodh suffered a great deal more, much harder blows of critics and the neglect of editors. He was never published in "Dharmayug" though one of the *Tar Saptak* poets, who was a generation his younger, then edited the journal.

All through his life he continued to write and live in debt and insecurity, in dingy dwellings in small towns of Madhya Pradesh. And when the world awoke to his greatness, Muktibodh was in a coma.

Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh (born 13 November 1917 at Sheopur, Madhya Pradesh) drew his first literary inspiration from his mother, Parvatibai, who belonged to a farmer's family of the erstwhile district town of Ishagarh in Madhya Pradesh. The rugged terrain, dark caves, forests and discarded wells of Ishagarh made a deep impact on the poet's infant mind for these are the recurrent symbols in most of his poems. His father, who retired as a police inspector, headed for some time the police department of the erstwhile Dhar estate. Muktibodh had his early education at Indore under the care of his aunt, Attabai, then a head nurse at M.T. Hospital. It was here that he met his wife, Shantabai, whose mother worked in his aunt's house as domestic servant. Against the tough resistance of his family, he married her when he was teaching in a school in Shujalpur after graduation. He also taught for some time at Jain High School at Jabalpur before joining the editorial staff of a weekly journal, "Naya Khoon", published from Nagpur. He gave facelift to the journal and subsequently became its editor.

The serious columns and editorials of "Naya Khoon" drew the attention of D.P. Mishra, former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, who invited him to join his journal "Sarathi". But Muktibodh was ever averse to Mishra, a life-long hatred which he never could overcome despite the latter's innumerable offers of assistance to him. Mishra always respected his political views and was also instrumental in shifting him during his last illness from a Bhopal hospital to the All India Institute, Delhi, where Muktibodh breathed his last. In Nagpur the poet also worked as a correspondent in the information department of the Madhya Pradesh Government and had a stint at the All India Radio. For sometime he was connected with the noted journal "Hans". On all these jobs he never felt at ease and left one after another. He looked for a secure, peaceful job which could provide him ample time for serious literary work. He, therefore, finally shifted to Rajanandgaon to become lecturer in a degree college. This was his last sojourn. When the poet was in Nagpur, he was quite a different person from what he was in Jabalpur around 1946: "Then I feared the people. Now they are scared of me," he confided to one of his

friends. At Rajanandgaon he suffered from meningitis and died in Delhi on September 11, 1964.

The works of Muktibodh are not too many. Except his two works, namely, *Nai Kavita Ka Atmsangharsh Aur Anya Nibandh* and *Kamayani: Ek Punarvichar*, all his writings came to light in print only after his death. The poems published in sporadic journals during his life time do not exceed thirty. The only monumental event of his literary publication was his foremost place in *Tar Saptak* edited by Agyeya which was published in 1943. All his works, *Chand Ka Muh Teda Hai* (poems), *Ek Sahityik Ki Diary, Naye Sahitya Ka Saundarya Shashtra* (essays), *Kath Ka Sapna* (stories), *Satah Se Uthata Hua Admi* (stories) and *Vipatra* (novelette) were published posthumously. His sole eminence in poetry rests on *Tar Saptak* and *Chand Ka Muh Teda Hai.* The latter is a collection of sixtyone poems, short and long.

Form for Muktibodh was not as important as content, its thought pattern and its development. His form emerged within the poem with fluidity, consistency and — what he achieved to startling success – intensity. He used myths but did not indulge in narrative boredom. In his archetypal myths he roamed about his world of fantasy, laying bare his psychic reactions in vigorous metaphors, symbols and imageries. No poet in Hindi has so extensively succeeded in exploring the inner psyche as Muktibodh. Eventually he employed the techniques of free association and dreams in his works, which were then unknown in Hindi poetry. He could not conceive of a poem without fantasy and believed that "reality transforms itself into fantasy in its creative end". Reality without a voyage through struggles is incomplete:

> Because it is difficult to work
> with mere sentiments.
> We needed something else so that
> blood would flow with the rays of the sun
> so that the heart could be
> as invincible valley, firm like conviction.

His symbols form a bridge between concrete and abstract. His imageries are usually dark and sombre. This is throughout conspicuous in poems like "Brahma Rakshasha", "Andhere Mein" and "Chand Ka Muh Teda Hai". The archetypal myth of Brahma Rakshasha appears in most of the poems though it occupies a larger canvas in the first poem. Muktibodh invested in this myth the

allegory of the eternal poet. In the long interior monologue of "Brahma Rakshasha" is perceptible the poetic utterance much as there is a kinship between the two in the matter of sufferance, torture and tension of the mind. The poem "Brahma Rakshasha" develops along a fantasy on the plane of consciousness. The mythical Brahma Rakshasha is shut up in a hoary, discarded well over which hang wild tree trunks. He cannot forsake history altogether. A victim of fear, apprehension, helplessness and threats to his existence he cleanses and talks to himself. The poet determines to undertake the work left incomplete by Brahma Rakshasha:

> Like a dead bird he was lost
> in the dark cavern under prickly thickets.
> Forever the flame slipped to slumber.
> Why did it happen? Why?
>
> * * *
>
> Like a loyal pupil of Brahma Rakshasha
> I wish to take up his incomplete work
> to carry his pain to a resolution.

Fantasy finds its way again in "Andhere Mein," a poem in eight parts. It is equally a long poem and the last piece in the collection *Chand Ka Muh Teda Hai*. During the compilation of the volume the poet wished it to be included in the end. Marked with dark and bizarre imageries, the poem celebrates the myth of *Kamayani's* Manu in abstraction. In his famous revaluation of Prasad's *Kamayani*, the poet had adjudged it a master-piece of fantasy and held that Manu, the hero of the epic, could be a Vedic survivor only in fantasy. Manu for him accordingly is an ideal of expression in the physical and spiritual world. He embodies the poet's expression and is no longer the primordial mystic man of flesh and bones:

> That mystic man is my expression
> until now undiscovered.
> He is the paradigm
> of my manifest influences,
> potentials and talents,
> developed to full maturity.

The poem glows with contemporary allusions and seeks to document the life of mid-twentieth century India. The poet is also a

prototype of the common man, forced to exist in painful situations. Like any other ordinary person he too is a victim of profane, treacherous and lopsided social forces. The society consists of so-called thinkers, ministers, critics, reporters, military officials and so on. All of them seem to conspire to take his life: "Kill him/Destroy him completely." This allusion has its reference to his torture in Jabalpur where he was constantly haunted by intelligence officials for his nationalist activities before independence. But to his dismay he had seen the hollowness and conceit of the people leading the destiny of the country after independence. He had seen through them their criminal perfidy. He is apprehensive of a violent retaliation for sneaking into their inner world: "Oh! I have seen them naked/I'll be punished for it."

The "surveillance" theme is also present in yet another long poem, "Chand Ka Muh Teda Hai". The moon and the moonlight in the poem bear no romantic accretions of what poets commonly seek to attach to them. Muktibodh combines sky and earth in a common curfew in which even the moon with its crooked face seems to be a spy and every ordinary man's life is unsafe: "And abroad/hissy conspiracy of husky splendour of moon/rages round the town. These are difficult days." The poet gives vivid exposure to the poor working class of Malwa living in their thatched huts to whom even nature with its rugged valleys and rocky soil is harsh and inimical. The Brahma Rakshasha here symbolises the hordes of bestial politicians in whose management of the country's affairs the poor become poorer with thickening sufferance. The poet comments against a backdrop of nature:

> Emerging from human skulls
> some Brahma Rakshasha has put on
> the broken sandals of Gandhi.
> Lashing leaves of pipal are excited.
> The village well mocks and roars with laughter.

Thus the poet is well at home while using the images of terror, chaos and horror. He is restless and the restlessness percolates his poems. No poet in Hindi had used before such imageries as "intestines of volcanoes" or "dripping beams of reeking blood". This is traceable in all other poems such as "Chambal Ki Ghati", "Chakmak Ki Chingariyan", "Pata Nahi", "Mere Log", "Nakshatra Khand", "Ek Swapna Katha" etc. So is the execution of fantasy in all these poems. Literally the poet chose to write only long poems

and confessed once: "I just cannot write short poems." He worked on his poems meticulously and patiently till he was satisfied. Therefore the charge of the critics that most poems of Muktibodh are half-finished or that they contain crude edges is insubstantial. In fact the rough edges of Muktibodh's poems mark the charm of his works. *Chand Ka Muh Teda Hai* has been edited by Shamsher Bahadur Singh.

Muktibodh's stories are usually an extension of thoughts he could not develop in poems. He did not relish story writing much. He wrote in all about twenty-one stories. The last story on which he was working before his death does not contain any heading though he had given its finishing touches. Eleven of his stories have been published posthumously in the collection *Kath Ka Sapna*. It followed another collection of nine stories. *Satah Se Uthta Hua Admi*. One of his stories, "Vipatra", is so long that it had to be published as a novelette. The plot of this novelette is set against the background of Rajanandgaon in Madhya Pradesh.

Nearly half of Muktibodh's poems are said to be untraceable, on which Muktibodh scholars are still at work. A complete revaluation of the poet in Hindi is still awaited. In many respects the poet shared the life of James Joyce, both in writing and physical existence. But what Joyce achieved in prose, Muktibodh did in verse. The poet suffered a great setback in 1962 when the Madhya Pradesh Government banned his treatise, *Bhartiya Sanskriti Aur Itihas*. Already his health had deteriorated fast since the sixties. He was a chain smoker and could hardly scribble a word without a draught of tea. The course of Hindi poetry would have been quite different had he survived and written just for half a decade longer. His influence on Hindi poetry is still alive. He could never see any difference between the poet and his poetry and whatever he wrote was born of his own sufferance. And such poetry cannot be ordinary as Yeats said in his "A Prayer for Old Age": "He that sings a lasting song / Thinks in a marrow-bone".

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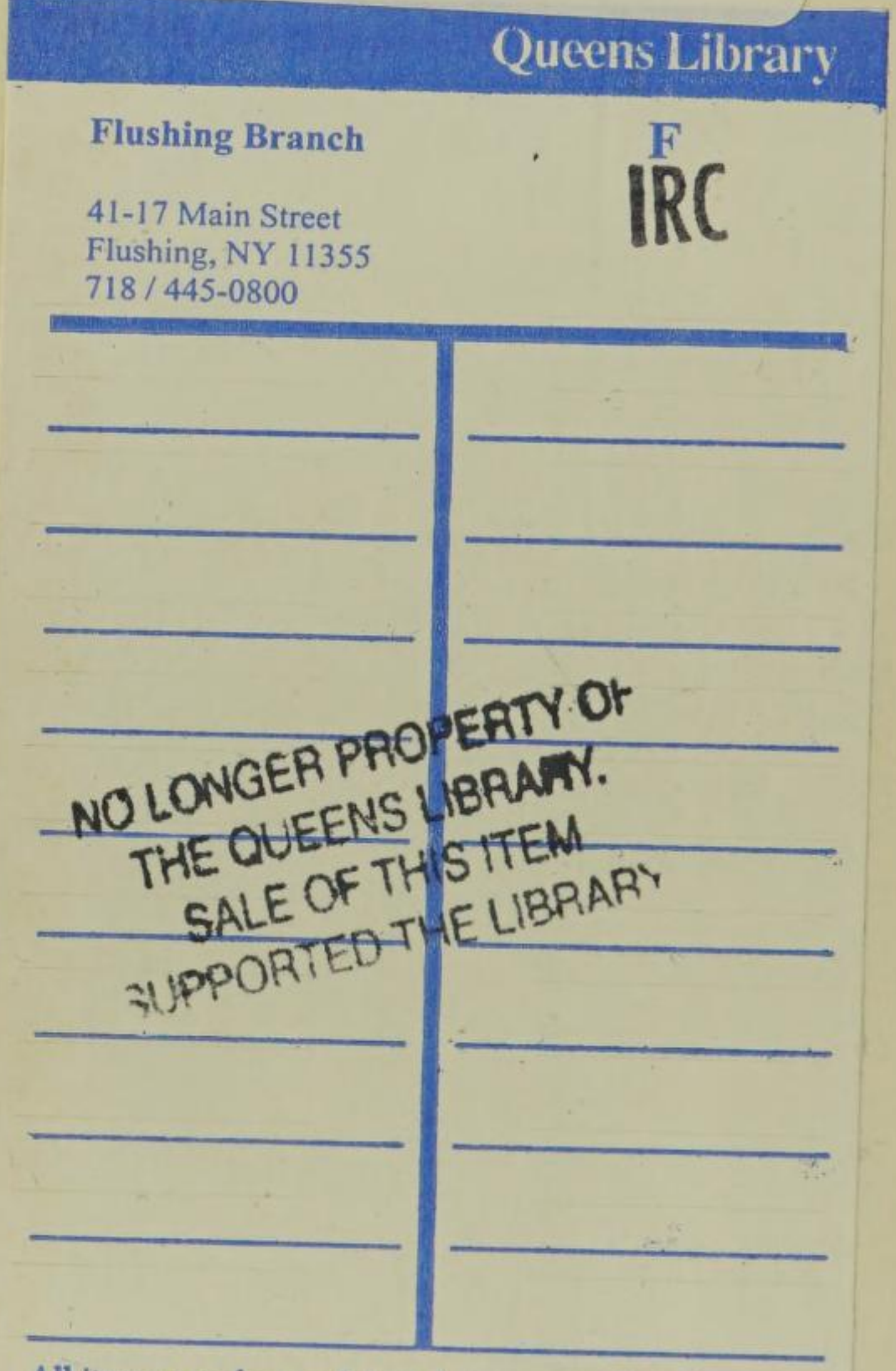
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Manohar Bandopadhyay, a journalist by profession, was born in Rajashahi district of Bangladesh. He obtained post graduation degree in English literature from Poona University. For over twenty years, he has been reviewing and writing books on English and Hindi literature in various journals and news dailies.

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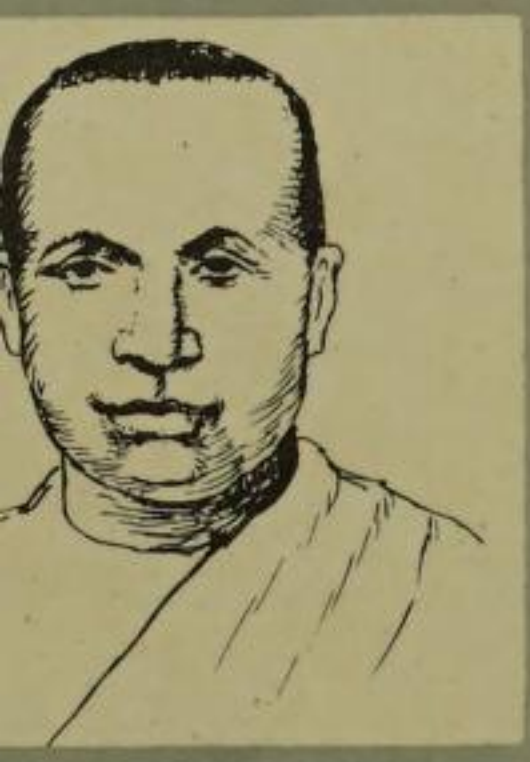

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